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THE EAGLE LIFE

Rev. J. H. JOWETT, D.D.

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THE EAGLE LIFE

AND OTHER STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY

REV. J. H. JOWETT, D.D.
Author of "Brooks by the Traveller's Way," "The Preacher," "The Friend on the Road," etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE BROODING SPIRIT	11
II	THE BLESSING OF A CURSE	15
III	BACK TO THE EARLY ALTAR	19
IV	THE BLIND SPOT	22
V	VISITING THE GREAT YESTERDAYS	25
VI	KEEPING IN TUNE	28
VII	THE SIN OF FORGETFULNESS	31
VIII	THE SCHOOL OF HUNGER	33
IX	THE CONTAGION OF FAINT-HEARTEDNESS	36
X	CLEAN FIGHTERS	40
XI	THE MEN OF MIGHTY DAYS	44
XII	THE BALANCES OF GOD	47
XIII	THE SIN OF PRAYERLESSNESS	51
XIV	THE EYES OF THE LORD	53
XV	LARGENESS OF HEART	56
XVI	FIRST AID	59
XVII	THE INVISIBLE FORCES	62
XVIII	STRENGTHENING THE HANDS	65
XIX	THE NOBLEST CONQUEST	68

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX	THE BLAST OF BURNING	71
XXI	SILKEN STRINGS AND CART-ROPES	74
XXII	THE DIVINE SIDE OF THINGS	77
XXIII	GLORY EVERYWHERE	81
XXIV	A MISSING HAND	83
XXV	THE LIFE THAT HAS NO MORNING	86
XXVI	THE VALLEY OF VISION	89
XXVII	COMPENSATIONS	92
XXVIII	THE MYSTERIOUS SWORD	95
XXIX	THE TRANSFORMED DESERT	98
XXX	THE SONGS OF THE ROAD	102
XXXI	THE EAGLE LIFE	105
XXXII	LIKE THE WAVES	109
XXXIII	THE DIVINE MINISTRY OF DISPLACEMENT	112
XXXIV	THE GAZE OF THE QUESTIONER	116
XXXV	THE ALMOND TREE	119
XXXVI	FIXEDNESS OF CHARACTER	123
XXXVII	THE MAKING OF HEROES	126
XXXVIII	IRREVERENT FEAR	129
XXXIX	LITTLE-MINDEDNESS	133
XL	WEEK-DAY HOLINESS	137
XLI	ON THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF	140
XLII	BAFFLED TO FIGHT BETTER	144

CHAPTER PAGE
XLIII OR RATHER! 146
XLIV SLOW WALKING 149
XLV THE EAGLE LIFE 152
XLVI THE STRENGTH OF THE INSIGNIFICANT . 155
XLVII DUNGEONED HEARTS 158
XLVIII THE SOUND SLEEP OF COWARDICE . . 161

THE EAGLE LIFE

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I

THE BROODING SPIRIT

"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

GEN. i. 2.

SOME time ago, out on the Atlantic, far beyond the sight of land, I saw a cloud whose outlines took the form of a great bird. Its mighty wings were stretched out so as to touch the two horizons, and it seemed like a mother-bird brooding over the entire deep. I recalled the word in Genesis which I have written above, and the marvellous cloud became to me a symbol of the most real but invisible presence of the Lord brooding over the varied waters of human life. For, indeed, that is the eternal yearning of the mother-heart of God, brooding over all its

circumstances, without and within, and to impress everything with the mystic virtues of the Divine breast.

The Divine Spirit would brood over the dancing, frolicsome waters of our joys. And it is the miracle of grace that when the Lord countenances a joy it is strangely enhanced. He adds sunshine to daylight. He transmutes happiness into blessedness. He endows our delights with heavenly virtue. The joy of the Lord becomes our strength. No one has ever tasted really superlative joy until there has brooded over his gladness the transforming and beautifying Spirit of God.

And He will brood over our labour when we are doing our daily business in great waters. He delights to glorify the common lot and common toil. It is His purpose to hallow the commonplace, the vast world of the ordinary in which we earn our daily bread. In "The Angelus," in which Millet pictures two peasants, man and woman, standing with bowed heads as the bells of evening send across the fields the call to prayer, the painter has thrown a softening light not only upon the humble worshippers,

but also upon the spade and wheelbarrow, the common implements of their toil. And that is right; the Light of Life will illumine the means by which we earn our bread and thereby transform them into a means of grace. When the Great Spirit broods over our business it becomes our Father's business.

And He will brood over the waters of our sorrows. Sometimes these waters roar and are troubled, and many precious things in our lives "shake with the swelling thereof." But the brooding Spirit will give us rest when "all without tumultuous seems." We may have the refuge of His bosom "while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high." The waters can do us no hurt so long as we are resting against the bosom of God.

And the same great Spirit will brood over the waters of death. Those waters reveal themselves in different ways to different pilgrims. Sometimes they are very high and overflow their banks. Sometimes they are so shallow that one can almost go over dry shod. But whether the floods are out, or the

passage is almost dry, the faithful Spirit broods upon the waters and the soul is kept in perfect peace.

"When I tread the verge of Jordan
Bid my anxious fears subside,
Bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan's side."

II

THE BLESSING OF A CURSE

"Cursed is the ground for thy sake."
GEN. iii. 17.

"CURSED is the ground!" Yes, but who has not realised the blessing which is hidden in the curse? God laid restrictions upon the land in order that, by the means of the restriction, man might be helped to recover his freedom. Man had fallen by disobedience. His relationship with God was perverted. He was afflicted with spiritual crookedness. How to recover his straightness, his rectitude—that was the problem. It could only be done by the wonderful ministry of the boundless grace of God. And yet that grace not only works upon the soul in direct and immediate constraints; it also works indirectly and mediately in a thousand different appointments. For one thing it curses the ground, so that the ground holds its harvests in bonds until they are released by

human toil. And so labour becomes imperative, and man has to work for his living, and his labour is the medium of divine grace. The ground is cursed so that the man may be blessed. His very toil is purposed to be the helpmeet of his salvation. When he works for a living his work is to aid him in the recovery of a life. And who has not tasted this blessing, which was thus enshrined in a curse? Honest labour is the antagonist of many a vile foe, and it drains away many a bad humour from the soul. "What a blessing it was I had some work to do!" That is the thankful utterance of millions of people, and they are finding their blessing in an original curse. The ground was cursed for their sake.

And how is it with the sorrows which sometimes leap upon us like lions from the thicket? We are dazed by the attack. Our united life was so sweet and simple; it was fragrant and lovely as a garden. And then death swooped down upon us, and the garden became an open grave. Nay, the entire world seemed to be smiten with the gloom of the tomb, and all our ways were darkened. But grace broke through the gloom. The Lord

was in the stricken garden. Angel presences whispered of resurrection. Yes, and there was another helper when everything seemed to be shaking. We had our work. "I don't know what I should have done if I had had nothing to do!" No, poor soul! but thy labour was a means of grace, and it steadied thy powers in days and nights of confusion. Yes, thy very toil was a sort of angel presence, and it was purposed to brace and hearten the pilgrim of the night. And so it is, we find our blessing in the primary curse. Our harvest rises in the wilderness. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake."

And all this is a revelation of the wonderful love of God. The clouds we so much dread are big with blessing. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." God laid upon us the burden of toil lest we should be corrupted by indolence into deeper degradation. For it is true indeed that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do. Idleness befriends disobedience. It relaxes all our powers by swathing the soul in a soft and softening atmosphere of enervation. That is why men who retire too early from business

speedily go to pieces. They have lost something vital. They have dismissed one of life's angels, and the tonic has gone from their roads.

Let us thank God for the blessing of labour. Let us praise Him for all restrictions which demand our toil. Let us be grateful for the ground that was cursed. In working to release the energies of the earth we help our own emancipation.

III

BACK TO THE EARLY ALTAR

"And he went on his way to Bethel . . . unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first."
GEN. xiii. 3–4.

AND that follows a dark chapter in the patriarch's life. It is a period stained by deliberate falsehood and deceit. It has been a time of increasing wealth, but decreasing piety. In this season there is no mention of any altar-building, as, indeed, there is no mention of the name of God. It is a sterile page of history, and it finishes up with the believer being rebuked by the heathen, and practically dismissed the country. And now we see him on his return, much increased in goods, but surely with the sense of something lacking, for which his possessions afford no recompense. And he makes his way to Bethel, "unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first." And there he sought to get hold of the broken ends of his life, to recover what he had lost, and in

the genius of the place, and in the reawakening of sleeping sentiment, to walk anew in the fellowship of God.

Well, it may be or it may not be our lot to be trudging through a period of shame. Perhaps we have gone to pieces in other ways. Somehow we may have got away from the only things that really matter, and we have been narcotised by the world, and we have been scarcely conscious of our loss. Or perhaps the tragedy of our time, the universal convulsion, has shaken us out of our sleep, and a vital craving has arisen for a nobler life. What shall we do? The one thing to do is to make our way to a deserted altar, some revered altar of our earlier days. And, first of all, let us hasten away to the supreme altar, from which all other altars get their fire and virtue; let us hasten to the Cross, that altar of superlative and incomparably lonely sacrifice. Let us take our pilgrimage there, with our burdens upon our backs, and when we get to that first altar we shall share the experience of Christian, and the burden will be loosed from off our shoulders and will roll away into a sepulchre, from which it will never rise again. "At the Cross, at

the Cross, where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away."

And let us get back to the altar of early consecration. It would be a blessed thing to visit the very spot where we made our first spiritual vows, to go to the little village church, to sit in the old pew, and under the influence of sacred memories renew our covenant with the Lord. "I will renew my vows unto Thee, O God." And we must visit the altar of early loyalties, for we have lost our first love. We must seek to regain the constancy of our early communion with the Lord. We must renew our tryst with Him in private prayer, and in family prayer, and in public worship and in Christian service. We must get back and rebuild these first altars. Nay, it will not be going back—it will be going forward, upward, and in our glorious recovery of abandoned treasure we shall sing with the woman of old, "Rejoice with me, for I have found that which was lost."

IV

THE BLIND SPOT

"And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."
NUM. xiii. 33.

THAT was an inventory with the main fact omitted. It was an estimate which left out God. These explorers moved in the world of things which are seen; they never sallied forth, on venturous quest, into the realm of the unseen. Indeed, to them the unseen world did not exist. Spiritual presences and forces were disregarded in their count. They were not even named. They saw nothing but physical giants, and they were dismayed.

It has been charged against William Pitt that he did not comprehend the Revolution in France. "He saw his enemy; he did not see his allies." It is a significant criticism, and its application is far wider than the field of European politics. The same defect of vision may be found among men and women

who sincerely profess their concern for the Kingdom of God. They see the enemy; they do not see their allies. They see the giants, but they do not see the Lord; nor do they catch a glimpse of the mighty but secret forces which follow His command.

And this imperfect vision, this blindness to the friendly allies, breeds the mood of pessimism. We become possessed by an excessive and debilitating self-depreciation. "We are in our own sight as grasshoppers." We feel no more competent to capture the enemy's citadel than a grasshopper is able to subdue a fort. Spiritual pessimism is the parent of moral paralysis. Nothing so saps our fighting power as the apprehension that we are sure to be beaten. The will eventually softens if it breathes the air of despair. If we estimate the combatants as "grasshopper versus giant" we are undone.

And therefore it is of vital importance that we cultivate the spiritual sight which gives reality to the unseen world. There is a mystical food which is gathered from harvests that grow on heavenly fields. Our spirits are fed on spiritual things, and they find their strength in the bread of life. Heavenly

manna is the food of heroes. Courage is the product of grace. Indeed, all our virtues draw their vigour from spiritual breasts. If we cut ourselves away from "the things which are not seen," we break communion with our spiritual supplies, and all our powers will become anæmic, we shall lack adequate resource, and when the giant appears we shall surely faint. When the spirit faints the end has come!

But pre-eminently, when we see the giants, we must swiftly turn the eyes of the soul upon the Lord. If we are dismayed by a king let us fix our gaze upon the King of Kings. The mighty Friend will give us confidence to meet the foe. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

V

VISITING THE GREAT YESTERDAYS

"Ask now of the days that are past."
DEUT. iv. 32.

YES, but what shall we ask about, and what kind of spoil shall we bring back from the treasures of the past? What have we in our purses or in our wallets when we return. In the "Life of Lord John Russell" I came upon a phrase which set me inquiring about my own habits. In a speech which he made in the House of Commons he said: "We talk too much, I think a great deal too much, of the wisdom of our ancestors. I wish we could imbibe the courage of our ancestors."

It is a very suggestive word, and one which may justly lead us to overhaul our ways. For it too often happens that when we go seeking for the wisdom of the past we bring back its prudence and reluctance. We go for counsel and we return with caution. We seek advice on our own new outlook and

then we stand in the "good old ways." Now suppose we take Lord John Russell's suggestion, and visit our ancestors in order that we may imbibe their courage, what sort of courage should we bring back to the new demands of our own time?

Well, first of all, I think we should have courage to make new trails over untrodden country. That was one of their most shining characteristics. They were not afraid to break new ground. They would even obey the grip of the dumb imperative, not seeing the distant scene. They went forth, "not knowing whither they went." They were not afraid to take risks with God. They were not afraid to be pioneers into more scrupulous rectitude and larger freedom. They marched out, with trumpets blowing, over the roadless moors, trusting to the guidance of the Lord they served. And we, too, are face to face with untraversed country. We have new ground to break. The wilderness is before us, but we think we hear the call of the garden in the very realm of the desert! Shall we venture? Let us imbibe the courage of our ancestors and dare to leave their

ways behind as they left the ways of those who had gone before.

If we drink the valour of our ancestors we shall have courage to stand by the Truth even when the crowd has gone another way. We can go to the past and talk with Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, or we can have fellowship with Mr. Valiant-for-the-Truth. Mr. Worldly-Wiseman is always in favour of safe measures, and he would go with the majority in the hope of something turning up—"you never know what!" His offered "wisdom" is always small prudence and compromise. But we need the courage of our great ancestors, courage to march with Truth in little companies, courage to "rejoice with the truth," in the absolute assurance that, in spite of all appearances, she marches to inevitable triumph. It is the courage which believes that Truth is God's leaven of the Kingdom, and therefore indestructible.

And we must imbibe the courage that sees the Captain, and is comparatively careless about everything else. Where is the Lord Jesus Christ in this business? There! Then forward into hardships, forward into light!

VI

KEEPING IN TUNE

"Thou shalt talk of them when thou walkest by the way."

DEUT. vi. 7.

HE was not to be satisfied with stated and formal times of meditation when his mind was to reverently consider the law of the Lord. He was to use his own moments in quest of the divine treasure, and he was to nourish the divine communion in his ordinary converse as he walked along the way. He was not only to consecrate the larger seasons, when he would tune his instrument, he was to give it devoted attention whenever his circumstances provided an opening. And that, I think, is most needed counsel in the culture of the soul. We not only need the prolonged times of praise, but also the short swallow-flights of song. We want the leisurely communion, but we also want the sharp ejaculation which expresses itself in a

single word. We need the long gaze at our Lord, and we need the frequent glance.

I have been told that Mr. Chase, the great American artist who recently passed to his rest, was in the habit of carrying about in his pocket small objects which he enjoyed looking at—an exquisite ring or some rarely attractive curiosity. He had his long seasons of studious contemplation of the loveliness that he yearned to capture in line and colour. But he had also moments of gazing when he turned his eyes on some beautiful thing. And we may follow his plan in the deepest things of the spirit. We can carry a divine signet ring about with us. We can carry with us through the day some great word of glorious revelation, and at odd moments we can bring it out and look into the depths of its eternal beauty. What is to prevent the busiest among us having some rich promise of grace which we can bring out and look at as we walk by the way? Perhaps we depend too much on the large and formal occasions, and we undervalue the ordinary times which stretch between these more dignified seasons, and which might be broken up into short and occasional glances at the treasures

of the King. There are things we can ponder as we bow in the Temple; there are lovely things we can look at as we go along the road.

Every literary student knows how much it helps in the acquisition and retention of a strong and sensitive English style to have a few great classical passages in the memory to which we can turn again and again, and so keep his own instincts and powers in tune with the orderly march and music of the masters. And so it is with the great styles of the soul, the grand manners of living, the revealed glory of the accepted children of God. Cannot we carry a little of their style with us? Cannot we snatch a glance at them as we go along the road? Cannot we sing a bit of one of their songs? Yes, we can do all this, and there will come a little rift in our grey sky and a beam of the eternal light will stream upon our way and transform a commonplace road into the highway of our God.

VII

THE SIN OF FORGETFULNESS

"When thou hast eaten, and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God."

DEUT. vi. 11, 12.

FULNESS is apt to breed forgetfulness. The multitude of our mercies may act like an opiate and make us heedless toward God. This is one of our subtlest perils. The bright day puts us to sleep. There are ten who can keep awake in the Valley of Humiliation, with Apollyon in fierce antagonism, to one who can keep awake on the Enchanted Ground, where the antagonism is found in the rarity of the air and the softness of the encompassing light. It is the luxuriant isle which becomes our Lotus-land. We were all alert when we were driven by the stinging blast, and were in danger of the engulfing deep. And thus it is true that the bright day brings forth the adder. A possible poison lurks in our comforts. We are most in danger when we have no need. When we have

everything we want we are in danger of losing God.

And so does the Old Testament bid us "beware"; and so does the New Testament bid us "watch." The sentinel of the soul must be continually on guard, and never more so than when the battle seems to be over, and life has become a feast. Our wills must be exercised in deliberate vigilance when we have left the desert behind and have crossed into Canaan. We must open our eyes in resolute purpose to see the seal of the Lord on the mercies which crowd our way. No divine privilege must be allowed to pass as a personal right. On the forehead of every providence we must read the name of the Lord. This must be our wonder: "When all Thy mercies, O my God, my rising soul surveys!" And that healthy wonder will ever be accompanied by the spirit of praise. Then will the songs of battle be sung again at the feast.

VIII

THE SCHOOL OF HUNGER

"I led thee and suffered thee to hunger . . . to teach thee that man shall not live by bread alone."
DEUT. viii. 3.

WHAT a strange school is this school of hunger! We are led into the discipline of deprivation in order that we may know the relative values of things. We discover the true place of a thing when it is taken from us. Once it seemed to occupy the front rank, to be one of the primaries of life; and when it was removed we found something else in the chief seat, and the missing thing was seen in a secondary place. The material slips away in order that the spiritual may be revealed. We lose a princeling in order that we may find a king. "In the year that Uzziah died *I saw the Lord!*" Even in the school of bereavement we come upon the Lord of life.

And this, too, is another lesson in the

school of deprivation:—"I suffered thee to be deprived of success to teach thee that man does not live by success alone." We live by disappointment as well as by attainment. Nay, in our disappointments we can gain finer attainments. The cloudless skies make a Sahara. It is the strangely mingled weather, with its dulness and cold, searching mists and rains, which makes "England's green and pleasant land." We cannot live by success alone. Success alone would make us hard and dry. We need the softening ministry of disappointment. We need the enlarging ministry of failure. We need the mysterious tonic of defeat.

And this, too, is a lesson taught in the school of hunger:—"I suffered thee to be deprived of joy to teach thee that man doth not live by joy alone." We unduly exalt our feelings, and we come to think of ecstasies as the normal mood of a wholesome Christian life. We seek to live in happy feelings rather than in a righteous and steadfast will. And so the bread of joy is taken away, and we are left to travel a piece of road in dry obedience. It is a lesson of infinite value—to faithfully walk the King's

road when we cannot hear the song of a solitary bird! Man doth not live by happiness alone; he lives in every changing moon, if only he is travelling toward the Holy City, intent on reaching its gates before the sun goes down.

IX

THE CONTAGION OF FAINT-HEARTEDNESS

"What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return into his house lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart."

DEUT. xx. 8.

OUR moods are contagious, and they are swiftly contagious. Our words can act upon others like a bugle or they can act like a chilling, drizzling rain; so it is with our moods. Our deeds can be inspiring in leadership, or they can be the ministers of depression; even so it is with our moods. Our settled temper is contagious even though it be silent. Our temperament is an energy and it is never at rest. Our very presences are influential, and their influence is active even when we only seem to be the passive receivers in an assembly and not the active leaders of the fellowship. Everybody makes a vital contribution, and our contribution may be like that of an iceberg drifting south

from polar seas and chilling the air for miles around.

All this is a commonplace in human experience. Who has not recognised the contagious influence of a mood or a temperament? For instance, the presence of a pessimist is always unfriendly to great ventures. He may say little or nothing, but his unglowing spirit lays an icy constraint upon everybody. The presence of Mr. Fearing always lowers the moral temperature, and so does that of Mr. Despondency and his daughter Miss Much-afraid. It is not that they say much, for they are often very reticent, but they rob the atmosphere of its inspiring vitality, and they tend to freeze all the genial currents of the soul. Who has not known their influence? Who does not know the freezing influence of the Rev. Mr. Fearall whether at a wedding or a funeral? And who does not feel that there is damp stuff in the fire when he is present, and we are trying to kindle some noble and venturesome enterprise? And who does not know Deacon Flat-soul, as flat as some once lively liquid which has lost its effervescence? What a business it is to keep exuberant when Flat-

soul is at the meeting and stays to the very end! These moods are very contagious, and we have to bestir ourselves if we would keep immune.

But are we responsible for our moods? Do they belong to a realm where our decrees do not run? Are we impotent before them? If we listen to some people we should assume that ill-moods are tyrannies which ought to excite nothing but pity. "You see, it is my temperament!" And when that is said it is thought that the explanation is complete and final. That is to say, we speak of temperament as we speak of climates, and we regard the changing of a temperament as about as impossible as the warming of the Arctic circle or the cooling of the Equator. "I am temperamentally faint-hearted!" That is their climate, and they have to live in it to the end of their days.

But temperament is not an unchangeable climate. Grace is not checked when it touches moods. If God's love can do anything it can change a man's spiritual climate. If we read the letters of the Apostle Paul, marking every instance which betokens a radical change of temperament, we shall be

surprised how great is the number of witnesses. Of all things which God's grace can bring into human life, none is more sure than the coming of sweetness and light. There is sweetness for bitterness, and lo! the cynic becomes a saint. There is light for despondency, and lo! the pessimist becomes a child of hope.

So that if the faint-hearts are to return home, lest their contagion seize their fellows, let them return to the Lord, and He will change their faint-heartedness into valorous strength. "When they saw the *boldness* of Peter!" Yes, and he was once a faint-heart, and he fainted in the day of adversity!

X

CLEAN FIGHTERS

"When thou goest forth in camp against thine enemies, then thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing."

DEUT. xxiii. 9.

THERE is something more than conscience in this, something more than the imperious demands of rectitude. The fighting powers in life are concerned, the strength which is at our disposal when we go out to meet the foe. Every form of sin is hostile to my strength. I cannot harbour an unclean thing and preserve my fighting forces unimpaired. My sin is always on the side of my adversary, because it lessens my power of defence and aggression. It may sometimes seem as if an unclean thing really added to my resources. A little bit of trickery may appear to fill a perilous gap and complete a circle of defences which would otherwise be broken. Falsehood may sometimes seem to bring another regiment to my support, and with my

loins girded about with untruth I march out to meet the foe.

All these appearances are delusive. The unclean thing is really robbing me even when it wears the guise of a benefactor. The devil can appear as an angel of light when his inward ministry is one of destructive fire. Sin is always a thief, and it is the sinner who is despoiled. Sin cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. Its deceptions are tragically pathetic. It is like the jerry-builder who seeks to ensnare my interest in electric bells and a little greenhouse while all the time the drains are leaking and the walls of the house are not able to keep out the rain. That is the way of sin. It gives me a plaything and assails my life. Always and everywhere sin robs me of my strength. "My strength faileth because of my iniquity."

So do I say that the evil thing in my ranks is really fighting on the side of my foe. That is true of the Church of Christ. When the Church of Christ marshals her forces against some national wrong her power is honeycombed by her own sin. During the great war we were able to reject men who were

physically inefficient, but we had no means of discerning the morally inefficient, the men of foul heart and defiled conscience, whose corruptions were eating away their central strength. And the church is immeasurably weakened by the sin which makes her one with the sins she assails. In everything in which she shares the nature of the enemy she so far offers him the victory. When the Church is like the world she loses the power to attack the world. Her kinship deprives her of her kingship. It is always her unlikeness which ensures her triumph. When she is pure she is overwhelming. It is the unclean things which throw her into sickness, and weakness, and sleep, and disaster. It is when she is fair as the moon, and clear as the sun, that she is terrible as an army with banners.

And so the first necessity of a strong and happy warrior is that he has a clean heart. There must be nothing unlawful in our tents if we would be the victorious soldiers of the Lord. There must be nothing disloyal, no lurking treachery. A secret sin can ruin an otherwise noble campaign. The secret sin may appear to be comparatively innocent,

but that is part of the grim deception. We all know that a little bit of seemingly pardonable forgetfulness—say some carelessness in neglecting the pointing of a house—can be the precursor of a terrible disease. Blessed are the pure in heart! "Thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing."

XI

THE MEN OF MIGHTY DAYS

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."
DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

WALT WHITMAN has a great word in his eulogy of General Grant. He describes him as "a man of mighty days, and equal to the days." The word is just a transcript of the divine promise. We are always purposed by our God to be more than a match for the largest circumstances, more than level with the vastest opportunity, more than adequate to the most exacting task. Mighty days are therefore days of royal privilege because they are days of promised power and endowment. "Bliss was it in that day to be alive, but to be young was very heaven!" The day of convulsion is the day of our Lord. The fearfully unfamiliar task is a strange door into a new inheritance. Our impossible marks the very hour of grace.

In the "mighty days" we can unlock the

mighty power of God. The background of every day is grace, and the more tremendous the day the more abounding is the grace. And therefore we can interpret our difficulties as the index of our resources. Our mission betokens our capital in the bank, and we can draw upon "the unsearchable riches" to the last demand of our need. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Then with God's mighty grace we can unlock ourselves. If life were just a sunny picnic that was never broken up by fierce tempest, by thunder and lightning and pelting rain, the greater part of our human resources would remain unused and concealed. It is in the mighty days that we discover ourselves. Latent gifts troop out of their graves. Buried seeds spring into vigorous life. We never thought we had it in us? The big struggle becomes not only our revealer, but also our unearther, and we put on strength and majesty like a robe.

We are living through mighty days, and by God's good grace we can be equal to the days. These are days of great unlockings, and we are having surprises on every side! Young fellows who were regarded as milk-

sops are revealing themselves as iron pillars. Once-while selfish men are unveiling their spiritual wealth in glorious sacrifice. Women who appeared to be living for nothing are giving their life like wine! The "mighty days" are upon us, and God is making us equal to the days.

XII

THE BALANCES OF GOD

"God is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed."

1 Sam. ii. 3.

We are apt to measure things by their size and not by their weight. We too often prefer the things which make the most show. We admire big things, and we are not deeply concerned with their essential content. And so we appreciate the Pharisee's loud-sounding offering more than the widow's mite. We are more attracted by swelling rhetoric than by simple speech. We delight in the big canvas. We rejoice in pageants and demonstrations. Our admiration is usually determined by scale rather than by weight.

But our God weighs things. He weighs our offerings, and He weighs them in His own spiritual scales, to see what spiritual significance there is in them. He weighs our money-gifts to ascertain their weight of sacrifice. And so it comes to pass that the wid-

ow's mite wins His praise rather than the rich man's abundance. He weighs our prayers to see what weight of holy desire there is in them. Prayers may be very long and very empty, and in the scales of God they are as light as the lightest chaff. In our prayers it is desire that weighs heavily, and penitence, and humility, and serious purpose of amendment. In our intercessions it is our self-forgetfulness that wins the favour of the Lord—our sacrifice in thoughtfulness, our true sympathy, the burden of our brother's need. God weighs our joys, and it is our thankfulness which reveals its mighty presence in the scales. In the estimation of the Lord many things are very weighty which have no regard in the esteem of the world.

It is the spiritual and the sacrificial which truly count in all things. Without these everything is light as vanity, however imposing the display it makes in the eyes of the world.

"Thou didst well it was in thine heart." Here is the Lord weighing an inner desire. David yearns to build a temple, and the yearning is not to be realised. But the gra-

cious Lord puts the longing into His scales, and it is found to have the weight of a perfected act. God does not wait for material creations, and then measure the value of our life by visible results. Our hungers are the vital part of our character, and a discerning judgment will estimate their force and intensity. "Blessed are they that hunger!" God weighs the inner things, the yearnings, the prayings, and the dreams. We measure only finished accomplishments. We revel in the dimensions of the temple which is built. God weighs the desire for a temple that was never built, and in His gracious judgment it has all the solidity of a temple made with hands. The man or the woman who longs to be a missionary, but whose yearnings cannot be realised, is counted as a missionary in the eyes of the Lord, and the will to do is reckoned as the deed done. "Thou didst well it was in thine heart."

Here are rich men ostentatiously dropping their offerings into the temple treasury. How the temple officials rejoiced in the sensational gifts! How they sounded the praises abroad! And there came a poor widow, and she quietly left her offering for

the Lord. Judged by measure it was next to nothing: when put into the scales of the Lord it outweighed all the other offerings put together. On a subscription list it would never have been noticed. Nay, it would never have been published at all, but it shone radiantly in the Lamb's book of life. The widow's service had in it something of Calvary, and the poor contributor was a blood-relation of the Lord. God weighs everything, and love-sacrifice is the heaviest thing in the world.

XIII

THE SIN OF PRAYERLESSNESS

"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

1 Sam. xii. 24.

How few of us have placed prayerlessness among our possible sins! And how even fewer have placed the omission to pray for others in the black list of sins against the holy Lord! We have called it thoughtlessness, or negligence, or even apathy, but we have not called it sin. But how this word sin, as used in this unfamiliar relationship, broadens and deepens the ministry and obligation of prayer! My needy brother has a right to my prayers. They are to be regarded as part of his capital strength. They constitute a part of the forces which were purposed to make him victorious in all the battle of life. My prayers for him are part of his army. I control some of his vital equipment. Without my co-operation in

prayer he is weakened and maimed. If I refuse him my prayers I deprive him of so much of his heritage. I defraud him. I wrong him in a far more deadly manner than if I refused to pay a material debt. I disclaim my spiritual debts, and he is impoverished in the central resources of the soul. I help him into moral bankruptcy by depriving him of his sacred dues. Thus do I wrong my brother, and thus do I sin against God.

All this, I say, is a very lofty conception of the obligation of prayer. It is something we owe to others, and if we refuse to pay we leave them poor indeed. On the other hand, how uplifting is the conception that by my prayers I am increasing a man's moral capital. I am helping him to mobilise his spiritual forces. I am sending him army corps to enable him to meet his enemy at the gate and overthrow him. I may share in his warfare, and I may rejoice and glory in his triumph.

XIV

THE EYES OF THE LORD

"The Lord seeth not as man seeth."
1 Sam. xvi. 7.

And how does the holy Lord look on things? Have we any guidance as to what it is that distinguishes His sight from that of the children of men? Yes, certain hints have been given to us about the character of His discernment. Here is one. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." The Lord's eyes survey the secrets of the inner life. That great truth has frequently been taught as though it were only a fearful thing and clothed in unrelieved gloom. We have thought of those searching eyes as the eyes of a policeman and not the eyes of a lover. We have regarded them as intent on looking for unlovely things and not for things that are lovely. They are eyes of suspicion rather than of trust. They are dross-finders rather

than gold-finders. And so the great truth has been perverted. Certainly there are aspects of the truth which ought to move us to serious disquietude. But there are other aspects which should inspire us with joy. The Lord looks upon the heart and He sees the hidden fault. But he also sees the precious things which He puts among His jewels. A poor widow drops a coin into the treasury and human observers see only a mite. But the Lord looks upon the heart and He sees untold millions in the gift. All the movements of the soul are known unto Him. He sees the desire that has never yet found fulfilment. He sees the hidden heartache which never hangs a black flag out of the window. He sees the prayer before it had uttered itself in words. He sees the love which has no adequate means of expression. The Lord sits over against the heart, and He knows every silent, stealthy thing that moves across its floors. He knew what was in man.

And here is another hint about the eyes of the Lord: "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts." It is the captain's view

of things at sea which is so different from the landman passengers. The captain can interpret the heavens. He knows the path across the trackless sea, the big waves have no terror in their approach, the night shineth even as the day. The landman is the victim of immediate discomfort. He cannot read the language of the skies. He sees things out of proportion. The breeze is a squall, and the rolling is a tragedy. And so it is in the affairs of life. We are landmen on the sea. The captain sees with "larger other eyes than ours." Our great Captain plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

XV

LARGENESS OF HEART

"God gave Solomon largeness of heart."
1 KINGS iv. 29.

LARGENESS of heart is the great primary gift in which all other moral and spiritual gifts become possible. Littleness of heart makes all big things impossible. The little heart has no capacity for noble entertainment. Only petty things can get in. Indeed, meanness is an imperative condition of entrance. A large heart is precious, first of all, just because of its roominess. It has marvellous powers of expansion. It always has room for something more.

Think of some of the big things that dwell with easy naturalness in the large heart. There is roomy communion with God. The prayers have a rich and inclusive fulness. The spiritual expectations are of a wealthy order. The praises go forth like well-laden argosies carrying exports from a rich and bountiful land. The joys are big, quiet satis-

factions, and not small merriments that empty themselves in an hour. And, with all these, the large heart has a roomy receptiveness. When God comes to it He finds abundant room wherein to bestow His goods. In such lives the good Lord always finds room in the inn. And while the large heart sustains a roomy fellowship with God it also cultivates a roomy fellowship with men. It is magnanimous in all its judgments. Its sympathies are like brimming springs, and they flow freely on every side. It is given to hospitality. It has the twin graces of the open house and the open hand.

Now here is a strange discovery of experience. A large heart cannot entertain a small thought or a mean mood. Littleness cannot breathe in an atmosphere of largeness. Lord Morley says of Herbert Spencer: "He was not one of those large minds in which small outward things have no place." That is a word which almost defines a law of human life. A large mind is immune from small invasions. And therefore our first and finest security against the petty enemies, which carry such a deadly poison, is to grow a bigger soul.

"No man, by being anxious, can add a cubit unto his stature." But in the realm of the spirit we can, by reasonable thought and consecration, put ourselves into such relationship to the Lord that we can surely obtain spiritual enlargement. The enlargement may not come to us solely through the ministry of supplication. It may come by our supplications co-operating with God in the control of apparently unfriendly circumstances. Our present lot may seem very unfavourable to spiritual growth, and yet the very antagonism may be appointed minister of our enlargement. "In my distress Thou hast enlarged me!" That is the divine paradox. We are shut up in straits, and we come out bigger men! Perhaps we entered our imprisonment as pilgrims who were only endowed with feet; we came out as birds of God, equipped with wings! But however the enlargement may come to us, and whatever be the manner of our circumstances, our growth is absolutely sure if we reverently relate ourselves to our God in faith and prayer, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.

XVI

FIRST AID

"Behold an angel touched him, and said unto him, 'Arise and eat.'"

1 Kings xix. 5.

Here is a prophet in the bonds of melancholy. The light of his hope has been blown out. His soul has been convulsed, and his faith is shaken and lies like an overturned pillow upon the ground. Life has lost its strong serviceableness and its attractive savour. Nothing remains that is worth while. The brief volume of his active, busy days is ending in futility and disaster. "And he came and sat down under a juniper tree, and requested for himself that he might die."

"And behold, an angel!" And what will the angel do for this fainting, drooping servant of God? What will the angel say? What first aid will he give to this broken spirit? Does he rend the temporal veil and rejuvenate the wayworn prophet by some vivid glimpse of the fighting hosts of God?

Does he make some startling declaration of the reality of the Creator's immediate presence and power? The angel's ministry is of a much more simple character. "He touched him and said, 'Arise and eat.'" Is that all? Yes, that is all. That is the beginning and the end of the angel's mission.

Now, that is very significant. An angel comes to a godly man who is depressed in spirit, and he tells him to give immediate attention to the needs of his body! The beginnings of restoration are to be found in an ordinary meal. Some of his spiritual faintness is due to his physical faintness, and if he remove the one he will help to dispel the other. He has allowed himself to get "run down," and his bodily exhaustion has partially induced the exhaustion of his soul.

That is a peril against which we need to be on our guard. Our spiritual maladies are strengthened by our bodily neglects. There are some forms of fearfulness which are directly attributable to our bodies being "out of sorts." Weakness engenders doubt. Anæmia produces sluggish wills. Bad blood creates irritableness and all the miserable retinue that follows in its train. Ill-fed

nerves foster nervousness and the ten thousand fears which portray a discordant and chaotic world. Many a man has the nightmare that his public usefulness has ended, and the cause of the nightmare is a body which is clamouring for a little more care. Even Mr. Spurgeon wrote out his resignation more than once, under the depressing conviction that his ministry was over; but it was only a rebellious body which was colouring everything blue. One night's sleep, and in the morning his purposed resignation was committed to the flames! Yes, a little more care for the body and many burdensome needs would never arise.

And in these times of sorrow through which we are living let us not make our griefs tyrannical by giving them the allies of exhausted bodies.

XVII

THE INVISIBLE FORCES

"Lord, open his eyes that he may see. And behold, the mountains were full of horses and chariots round about."

2 Kings vi. 17.

It is always our peril to think that the visible field reveals all the factors in the campaign. We are bondslaves to our sight, and we are therefore its victims. We make a survey of our circumstances, and we are appalled because the opposing forces appear overwhelming. We do not see the armies of the air, the invisible legions which fill the mountains with their horses and chariots. We leave out the hosts of the Lord.

The invisible army moves with strange quietness. It is as a wind that bloweth where it listeth. Nay, scarcely a wind; more like a breath! The army of the Lord is like an atmosphere. Its destructive ministry is as silent as the frosty air of a calm winter's night. "The grass withereth because the

breath of the Lord bloweth upon it!" That is all that is needed. And that withering breath is blowing upon all the forces of iniquity. It is the certain minister of dissolution. We can no more avoid it than we can escape the air we breathe. No strategy can outmatch it. No subtlety can dodge it. The evil doer is in God's withering breath. "Who can stand before His cold?"

On the other hand, the same atmosphere can be as the breath of the spring. It is the "quickening spirit." It is the secret of mystical energy. In its gracious friendliness "the leaf shall not wither." It is the ally of the faithful, and it endows the cause of rectitude with eternal youth.

The Apostle Paul had a great way of calling these invisible forces to mind. Only he did not call them forces: to him they were presences—nay the one Presence, and the breath was just the mighty Personality of the Holy Ghost. And in the blessed assurance of this great fellowship he goes along his ways, exultantly confronting the seemingly impossible. He goes to Ephesus in this alliance of the Spirit. He goes to Corinth. And he impatiently hungers to

face the tremendous antagonisms in Rome herself! He craves the biggest tasks in order that he may reveal the more bountifully his resources in grace. He leagued himself with the Lord, and He knew himself to be "mighty to the pulling down of strongholds." And so shall it be with us if we ceaselessly seek the same communion, looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. When we go out upon a righteous way, even though our enemies are massed in fierce hostility, the mountains shall be full of invisible horses and chariots, for the Lord of Hosts shall be with us, the God of Jacob shall be our refuge.

XVIII

STRENGTHENING THE HANDS

"And they strengthened their hands for this good work."

NEH. ii. 18.

WHAT is the good of planning a work if we have no strength? What is the use of elaborate programmes if we have no provisions? What is the good of building windmills if there is no wind? And yet that is just what many of us are always doing. We pass resolutions, but nothing happens. We dream and talk about rebuilding the battered city, but the walls do not rise. And so often our visions become indolent reveries, and we just dream of doing all day long. But these men of the olden time not only had their great dreams, they strengthened their hands in God, and into them there came a glorious power of "lift," and they laid hold of the ruined heaps of their city, and lo! the desired

walls rose in their purposed plan and order.

In his essay on Milton, Hazlitt has this glowing and suggestive word: "Milton seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark." And so Milton's imagination was fired with religious zeal. And so his genius was elevated and sanctified. It shone and burned with mystic flame. Milton's pen was taken in hand in the very passion of consecration. And this is surely the secret of triumphant work of every kind in the Kingdom of our Lord. Our work so often fails because we do not bring enough to it. We do not come to the pen from the ark. We take it up with a cold hand. We approach our tasks from below and not from above. "Ye are from beneath: I am from above." No holy retinue accompanies us in our enterprise. And therefore we are unarresting and unimpressive. There is no inevitable energy in us wherewith to shape disorderly circumstances into the order of the Divine Will. Circumstances laugh at us! "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" We issue our commands before we have had communion. We lay hold of our tools before we have strengthened our

hands. We take the pen before we have touched the ark.

In times like these the manner in which we approach our problems will determine whether we shall solve them. There is no end of rebuilding to be done. Precious things are lying in ruin on every side. Let us come to our tasks from the very sanctities of the holy place. Let us strengthen our hands for the work, with this as our prayer: "Establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."

XIX

THE NOBLEST CONQUEST

"He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city."

PROV. xvi. 32.

THE first of all kingdoms is the kingdom of the soul. No other kingdom can be truly prosperous if this is a scene of insurrection and discord. The resultant worth of other kingdoms is determined by the order and harmony in this. Well-regulated spirits are the first essential to the might and federacy of an empire. But the wise rulership of the spirit does not find its analogy in the crushing tyranny of the despot, but in the firm and illumined control of an orchestra. We do not rule the spirit by suppression or mutilation, but rather by a wise balancing of all powers, every faculty being permitted to exercise itself in its appointed place and order. Our control is perfected when "*all that is within us*"—every instrument in the

orchestra—praises and blesses God's holy name. The welcome issue of all strong rulership in the spirit is not servitude, but music.

The enemy who succeeds in debasing my spirit is more triumphant than if he had conquered my cities. The damage is more deadly. If his hatred for me kindles a similar hatred for him he is terribly victorious, even though I lay him in the dust. If his violence inflames my judgment, if he incites me to rashness and folly, he is winning a bigger victory than he dreams. If he goads me with the policy of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" he has sacked and squandered my richest treasury. But if I keep my spirit whole, if I hold it in the mood of sanity and serenity, if I preserve it from all incendiary fires, I have won my greatest victory, and other triumphs will follow in the issue.

But to rule the spirit, to keep all its powers harmonious when tempted to panic and riot, to maintain chivalry in all my warfare, to keep the holy lights burning on the most tempestuous night, demands great resources of strength. And the need has been anticipated, and we can find our resources in Christ. "Be strengthened in the grace which

is in Jesus Christ." That initial strength is not a human achievement, it is a divine equipment. It is not the creation of a will, it is the gift of grace. It is an enduement, the enduement of the Holy Ghost. A man is able to rule his spirit when he himself is kept by God.

XX

THE BLAST OF BURNING

"The Lord shall purge the blood of Jerusalem by the blast of burning."

Isa. iv. 4.

Here is a case of foul blood, and when the blood is foul the entire body is infected with defilement. When the stream is poisoned the deadliness touches the entire countryside. When the postman has smallpox he leaves it at every house. The blood is the courier of the body. It is the vital current, and if the blood is polluted every fibre of the flesh will share its corruption. And the blood of Jerusalem was impure. Her life was not affected by a temporary fever, or by some transient spasm of irritability or fear. She was not troubled by a slight chill which had made her lukewarm, and which had robbed her of speed and nimbleness in the paths of obedience. She was the victim of bad blood. She had become bad at heart. Her soul was

poisoned. There was something rotten at the very core of her being. It was not a passing indisposition, it was a deadly possession.

How is it to be dealt with? "By the blast of burning." The figure of speech may seem confusing, but the meaning is clear. Defilement has to be met by fire. Fire is the last and greatest resource in the ministry of cleansing. When water is powerless, fire is efficient. The plague in England in 1665 was burned away by the great fire in 1666. And so it is in the ministries of God. There are plagues and defilements in society which seem as though they can only be reached and removed by the fires of calamity and tragedy, and by the blasts of unutterable woe. There are fields which cannot be cleansed by means of ordinary culture, by the plough, or the spade, or the hoe, but only by the ministry of fire. And God's fire comes! The blast of burning visits cities, and countries, and races, and through much suffering they reach a cleaner, sweeter life. The severity may appear destructive, but the destruction is the instrument of a gracious culture, as it is also the gloomy pioneer of a more bountiful life. "The frost, which kills the harvest

of a year, saves the harvest of a century by destroying the weevil or the locust." God's frosts are the ministries of coming harvests. God's fiery blasts are the fiery dawns of a better and larger day. Jerusalem is purged by the blast of burning. Our God is a consuming fire.

XXI

SILKEN STRINGS AND CART-ROPES

"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope."

Isa. v. 18.

That is always the order of moral degeneracy. We begin by toying with iniquity; we end by being bound by it. When a liner is nearing the dock a light cord is thrown across the gulf. A heavier line follows the light line, and then a heavier one still, until the mighty vessel is held in bonds. And that is how our communion with iniquity begins. It begins in a fellowship as light and flimsy as a gossamer thread. We say of the first frail thread, "I can beak it whenever I like!" And, all unrecognised by us, the thin thread becomes a more complicated line until it becomes as a cart-rope which binds us in servitude.

Now, no man when he begins to fondle iniquity, ever purposes to be bound by it. If the cart-ropes were brought out at the

beginning of our trespass we should all recoil in fear, and turn hastily away. But the tempter does not begin with cables and chains; he begins with cords of vanity. In Tennyson's "Vision of Sin," the youth who is made captive is first of all ensnared by his vanity. "From the palace came a child of sin, And took him by the curls and led him in." That is to say, a little flattery was the first agent of servitude. A few compliments were passed, and the youth was on his way to ruin. But the poem ends with the gloomy spectacle of a wretched cynic dragged about by cart-ropes in the most tyrannical bonds.

No one ever intends to be a drunkard. The drunkard's degradation does not begin with cart-ropes, but with attractive cords of vanity. It begins in agreeableness, in light conviviality, in something done in the name of good fellowship. No one ever intends to be an inveterate gambler. Gambling begins as a mere condiment to the feast, adding a little spice to the game. And then the condiment begets a fierce appetite, and it becomes more important than all the rest of the feast. No one ever intends to become a confirmed liar. A liar begins his degrada-

tion in smooth words, in vain compliments, in unworthy flatteries. He indulges in easy expediencies, and in so-called white lies, which do not carry even a suggestion of a succeeding chain. All forms of iniquity begin their preliminary scouting with light threads, coloured threads, gay ribbons, but the baser, blacker servitude is on the way.

The great secret of moral and spiritual safety is to be able to discern the silken cords of vanity and not to touch them. We must exercise our imaginations, and we must always see the cart-rope at the end of the fragile line. If we play with the threads we are surely undone. We must know the evil one when he approaches us with fairy webs, and we must turn away in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is no surer way of acquiring a healthy vigilance than by companying much with Jesus, and becoming one of His intimate friends. Communion creates likeness, and in the wisdom and strength of the Lord we can practise His resistance and share His glory.

XXII

THE DIVINE SIDE OF THINGS

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord, high and lifted up."

Isa. vi. 1.

Isaiah had never had that kind of vision before. Most certainly he had had spiritual experiences, but never one in which the Lord was so exalted in overwhelming glory. And the strange thing is that the vivid vision blazed upon him through the pall of the blackest night. His ambitions had been dashed in disappointment; his life was lying in confusion. Uzziah had fallen, he who was "the pillar of a people's hopes," and it seemed as if the chariot of progress was irreparably overthrown. And it was in that dark hour, when the glory of Uzziah had vanished in death, and when Isaiah's own prospective glory had faded away, that the glory of the Lord arose like the rising of the

sun after a black, tempestuous night. Isaiah had been too entirely engrossed with the human side of things. Now his eyes were turned to the divine side of things, and he began to live and serve in the consciousness of the glory of the Lord. "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up."

And that is surely one of the purposed ministries of apparent misfortune and disaster, to open out the divine side of things and to unveil the heavenly glory. And indeed we may say that the seeming failure is no failure at all if it uncover the divine; the calamity has then become the medium of a greater triumph. Ellice Hopkins was called upon to walk rough roads where, for miles, grinning defeat was her constant companion. Her life had been turned to a crusade whose conditions she viewed with repulsion. In the early stages of the unwelcome journey she lived under an irritating sense of personal ignominy and humiliation. And then there came the unveiling! She wrote these words in after days: "My long experience in the Valley of Humiliation has effectually rid me of the longing to see *my* glory!" She had been ravished by a vision of the glory of

the Lord, and all smaller fears and resentments had faded away.

When our troubles destroy the yearning for our own glory they have been converted into the ministers of spiritual growth. The apparent rotting of the flax, when it is thrown into the seemingly unfriendly tanks, prepares the stronger strands for finished webs. And when our vanities, and our self-gloryings, rot away in the waters of hardship or affliction, we may be sure that the bitter waters have ministered to us as the veritable waters of life. When "my glory" changes into "Thy glory," and when we are led to pray, "Show me Thy glory," the valley of Achor has become a door of hope.

And that is how we may test our trend and our progress. Are our little gloryings fading away in the presence of something brighter? Are the mere stage-lights and the limelights going out? Is ambition changing into aspiration? Is sight becoming insight? Are we seeing behind the veil? Are we catching the vision of the divine side of things, the glory of the Lord? Is quest of personal glory changing into prayer, and worship,

and consecrated service? Are we finding our God in the night? Do we see Jesus walking across the troubled seas? "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord!"

XXIII

GLORY EVERYWHERE

"The fullness of the whole earth is His glory."
Isa. vi. 3.

This was the song of the seraphim, those burning ministers whose purity is translucent, and who dwell in the immediate presence of God. And they sung that the fullness of natural glory is the vesture of the Lord. Wherever they gazed upon beauty, they knew it to be the hem of His garment. Every glorious thing was significant with God. Everywhere they heard the rustle of mystic wings. Their purity gave them senses of superlative refinement, and material things became transparent and sacramental, and they held communion with the inward spirit, which was the Spirit of God.

Now we can almost test our spiritual strength by our discernment of the divine glory. The power of our lens is determined by the measure of our purity. We may

gauge our purity by our vision. How much, then, of "the fullness of the whole earth" do we recognise as the glory of God? How much of nature is vesture, the garment of an immediate Presence? When we go on our holidays to grand or lovely places, what kind of a time has the soul in vision and communion? How much of the grandeur of loveliness is felt to be holy ground, haunted by the indwelling Spirit of God? Or, when we gaze upon anything noble and glorious in human life, with what measure of readiness do we interpret the human "fullness" as the shining glory of God? Are our eyes dim and is our vision sealed, so that we can be in the wide house of the Lord and not know it, and be in the very brightness of His glory and not discern His presence? It is all a matter of eyes, and eyes are all a matter of holiness.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Lord, that I might receive my sight!" "Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." "I will; be thou clean." And in that reaction the eyes are enlightened to behold the glory of the Lord.

XXIV

A MISSING HAND

"Who will go for me?"

Isa. vi. 8.

Here is the Almighty waiting for a human instrument. The mere statement of such a possibility touches the soul with awe. The Father of our spirits has imposed upon Himself a limitation which makes Him dependent upon his children. There is divine work which tarries until the appointed soul arrives. We are exalted to be fellow labourers with God. What sublime dignity is hidden in the fellowship! What a coronal glory it confers upon the common life! The seemingly tiny inlet is related to the immeasureable seas. God's holy purposes lay hold of human ministries, and the insignificant inch is glorified by the Infinite.

And so it is that we men and women are to be standing at attention, waiting to receive our commissions. We are to have our

loins girt and our lamps burning. We are to be "shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace." For we never know when some purpose of the Lord is ripening, when a human instrument will be wanted and a new commission given. "At such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." And therefore it is our wisdom to be always ready, listening for the ennobling summons of the Lord. "How soon can you be ready for the Soudan?" Gordon was asked. "I am ready now," he answered. "As much as in me is," said the Apostle Paul, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also."

And what are our commissions likely to be? For the vast majority of us they are likely to be quite ordinary errands. The essential things in human life are spiritual vitalities, and these are carried in the simplest ministries. Apparently commonplace fidelities are laden with heaven's grace. The crying needs of the world are elemental, and they are to be met by the elemental satisfaction of faith, and hope, and love. To be the minister of these graces is to be the fellow labourer of God. I remember an incident in "Aurora Leigh." Lucy Gresham, the poor

seamstress, lay dying in an attic. Marian Erle, also a poor seamstress, was in the workroom with the other girls when she heard the news. Laying down her work at once, she hastened away to the sufferer that she might be God's minister in the hour of need. "'Why, God,' thought Marian, 'has a missing hand this moment; Lucy wants a drink perhaps. Let others miss me! Never miss me, God!'" That willingness to be the missing hand is the secret and the genius of a consecrated life.

XXV

THE LIFE THAT HAS NO MORNING

"If they speak not according to His word, surely there is no morning for them."

Isa. viii. 20.

If a man build not according to the plumb-line there cannot dawn upon him the glory of a finished pile. If a man despise the plumb-line his work will not issue in a shining temple but in a dismal rubbish-heap. Even in architecture there is no morning for the disobedient: there is only the darkness of futility and disorder. The rebellious builder, who builds as he pleases, is assuredly moving toward chaos and night. And if a man build not his life according to the divine word there will be for him no morning of bright and finished achievement. The trend of his day is toward a miserable sunset, and not toward the morning star and the things of the perfect day. When a stone is well and truly laid it is sealed with the promise of

glory: when it is laid in iniquity it is sealed with the assurance of doom.

"Light is sown for the righteous!" It is God who said "Let there be light," who still makes all our mornings, and it is only when our wills are buried in His will that we become the children of promise, the promise of a wonderful dawn. There are some people who are most evidently and conspicuously people with a morning! It is not a matter of wealth or poverty; it is a matter of spirit, and attitude, and relation; and we can clearly see that they are stepping *eastward,* and their faces are even now catching the first flush of the dawn. And there are others who are quite as evidently people without a morning. When we think of them, or look upon them, when we consider their mode and manner of life, we think of twilight and evening bell, of sunset and coming night. Their little game will be played out to-day—quite played out!

The man who builds on falsehood has no morning. The nation that builds on falsehood has no morning. It is truth alone that belongs to the dawn and has the promise of the day. Falsehood belongs to the darkness,

and in darkness and dissolution it will find its appointed end. "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be." "But He shall make thy righteousness go forth as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

XXVI

THE VALLEY OF VISION

"The valley of vision."

Isa. xxii. 5.

That is a very strange conjunction. We could have understood the phrase had it been "The hill of vision." It is the mountain summit which is usually associated with outlook. One remembers "the high hill, called Clear," where Christian and Hopeful could dimly see the gates and also some of the glory of the celestial city. But here it is the valley which is the home of vision. The outlook is given in seeming imprisonment. We are shut in by surrounding hills, and our sight attains finer perception and range. The limitation becomes the minister of expansion. The big wonder is born in a narrow place. I remember my surprise when I paid my first visit to the Tower of London. At one point we were taken along a narrow, dingy passage which opened into the gloomy

chamber where the Crown jewels were kept. One was almost startled to see those flashing jewels in such confined and grey surroundings; but a similar wonder often startles the saint when, in some gloomy valley experiences, there flash upon him the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And now take this word from the spiritual experience of Horace Bushnell: "I have learned more of experimental religion since my little boy died than in all my life before." Bushnell had had many rare experiences on the mountain-top, but they were nothing to the visions that were unveiled to him in the valley. The darker school gave him the finer sight. And may we not reverently remember the word which is spoken of our Lord, that "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." That mysterious enrichment came to Him in the valley. And indeed, we may be perfectly sure that millions of God's children have found enlargement in the valley. They have begun to see, or they have strengthened their sight, in the very season when they were blinded with tears. It is in the valley that we see into the heart of God. There are narrow roads in

the valley in which we share "the fellowship of His sufferings," and in that sacred communion we begin to see a little way into the dark mysteries of His Cross. It is because, in our own degree, we are like Him, that we see Him a little "as He is."

So that when we are led into sombre valleys, let us humbly and expectantly assume that we are in the place of vision. Maybe the Lord is going to anoint our eyes with eye-salve, and He will impart unto us one of His secrets. Perhaps it was needful that we should be led into the valley in order that we might receive our sight. And thus life's valleys will be found to be the abodes of the divine mercy as well as those breezy heights which catch the first beams of the rising sun. Even in the valley we may see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.

XXVII

COMPENSATIONS

"He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind."

Isa. xxvii. 8.

And, therefore, as we say, there is always something to be thankful for. If one thing visits us another thing is kept away. Or if there is impoverishment in one direction there is enlargement in another. When the darkness falls the stars come out. When winter strips the trees hidden prospects are disclosed. When we are sick shy kindnesses steal out of their seclusion. We never knew we had so many friends until death broke our fellowships. And so we are smitten on one side, and we are graciously liberated on another. We are bound with chains, and we have fellowship with angels. We are "cast down, but not destroyed."

It is a blind girl in one of Ian Maclaren's stories who is speaking: "If I dinna' see,

there's naebody in the Glen can hear like me. There's no a footstep of a Drumtochty man comes to the door but I ken his name, and there's no voice oot on the road that I canna tell. The birds sing sweeter to me than to onybody else, and I can hear them cheeping in the bushes before they go to sleep. And the flowers smell sweeter to me—the roses and the carnations and the bonny moss rose. Na, na, ye're no to think that I've been ill-treated by my God, for if He didna' give me ae thing, He gave me many things instead."

Such is the confidence we may have in our God. He leads the blind by a way they know not. When they lose their eyes other discernments are quickened, and they have the mystic intimacy of an unerring Guide and Friend. Samuel Rutherford used to say that when he found himself in the cellars of affliction he began to look about for the King's wine. And John Bunyan used to look for the lilies of peace and the Lord's heartsease in the Valley of Humiliation. And out of the eater comes forth meat; the lion which prowls forth to slay us to-day will provide us with honey to-morrow.

What gracious compensation the Lord is

prepared to give to our spirits in our day of desolation and distress! He feeds us with hidden manna. We have bread to eat which the world knows not of. We grow even while we are in straits. "In my distress Thou hast enlarged me." That is the wonder of it, that when destruction seemed to abound the soul had a mystic nourishment which established it in a more robust and vigorous health. Hagar was in the wilderness, but the Lord opened a fountain of water. In desert-places angels come and minister unto us. "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind." He giveth songs in the night.

XXVIII

THE MYSTERIOUS SWORD

"Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of man: and the sword, not of man, shall devour him."
ISA. xxxi. 8.

WHEN we have counted the material arms upon the field we have not told the full tale of contending armaments. There is a devouring sword, not held in the grasp of man, and it is fearfully active in unseen but sure destruction. That invisible sword can slay invisible things. For instance, it can kill the vitality of a man's hope, and sink him in despondency and despair. It can cut the sinews of his courage in the very thick of the conflict, and make him shake with fear. It can pierce the strength of his judgment, and cause him to wander in self-deception and delusion. It can maim men who have received no wound, and it can make the materially mighty helpless as babes. "The sword, not of man, shall devour him."

This invisible sword is the ally of the truth, and it is the antagonist of iniquity. It is even so in the individual life. The soul that is leagued with iniquity is being devoured by the sword. Nay, it is the ordination of the holy Lord that evil itself becomes a sword and does deadly work in the soul. "Evil shall slay the wicked." And so it often happens that the apparent instrument of a man's prosperity is at the same time the instrument of a deeper ruin. The falsehood that built a fortune slew the angel in the soul. "The wages of sin is death." The evildoer cannot escape this sword of the Lord.

And this invisible sword is also active in the corporate life of States. When a nation enthrones iniquity, when it harbours injustice, when it exalts self-will into a crusade, when it makes material interests supreme, "a sword, not of man, shall devour it." The sword can no more be escaped than can God himself. The nation may remain for a time in apparent strength, as the beams of a house which have been hollowed out by the white ants may seem to be perfectly whole, but the coming day will reveal that its inner

strength is hollow and dead. And what shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world and lose its soul? Or what shall a nation give in exchange for its soul?

XXIX

THE TRANSFORMED DESERT

"The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."
ISA. XXXV. 1.

I HAVE lately read two fascinating articles, which had most suggestive titles. One of them was entitled "Notes from an Ambulance Train," and it contained the detailed observations of a fervent botanist, and the observations were made through the window of the train as it journeyed up the line for a load. "Traveller's joy runs riot over the bushes and sloping banks; coming just after the roses have gone, it is especially welcome." "The Scottish bluebell is a welcome sight in the hedgerows." And this is from an ambulance train running through the desolate parts of France! The second article bore the title, "The Wild Flowers of the Trenches," and the enthusiastic observer tells how he has seen along the line of the trenches, and around the shell holes, such

flowering plants as marguerites and hedge parsley and poppies. When I read these eager records of these waste places I could not but remember the words of the astonished prophet, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose."

Seen from an ambulance train? A much more marvellous record might be compiled from the intimate observations made by the sick and the broken as they look out over the fields of their stricken life. I went to see one such sick friend in New York, and he quietly said to me as he lay in bed: "Things look very different when seen from the horizontal position." Yes, and it is not only that things appear in different colours, and assume quite different shapes and sizes, but the grace of God reveals itself in fresh and gracious surprises. The *via dolorosa* has many a sweet blossoming thing springing up in the gloomy way. Yes, even "traveller's joy runs riot over the bushes," as the joy of the Lord appeared in the prison at Philippi to two scourged men whose feet were fast in the stocks. "At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises, and the prisoners heard them."

What is that but the traveller's joy? And what surpassing plants of heavenly heartsease appear when the Lord makes the wounded spirit whole and calms the troubled breast! And what exquisite gentleness when the great Physician is busy with our broken hearts, and when He wipes away the secret tears which no other eye can see! There was one sufferer who emerged from his season of grief and bruising with this grateful song upon his lips: "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." His eyes had been opened to undreamed-of riches in the inheritance of grace, and God's gentleness had made him great.

The wild flowers of the trenches! Beautiful things springing up in the home of struggle! The scenes of warfare now become the scenes of novel loveliness! The fields of carnage the site of new worlds! And who can tell what strong and healthy moral growths are to spring out of all the tragic desolations of our time? God's seed has been sown in the blood of our sacrifices and on the stern wilderness golden harvests will be reaped by generations yet unborn.

There be some who say, "To what purpose is this waste?" The waving corn of coming days shall be the answer and the memorial of our sacrifice.

XXX

THE SONGS OF THE ROAD

"The ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with songs."

Isa. xxxv. 10.

In his very gracious and inspiring life of his father, Denholm Brash, his son tells us of his father's passionate love for the Methodist Hymnal, and how they agreed to call the sections on Pilgrimage and Guidance "The Songs of the Open Road." I like the title. It tells me that heavenly pilgrims are to be known by their songs. When we overtake them, or when they pass us on the road, they are to be distinguished by their singing. When Christian was creeping through the appalling Valley of the Shadows, and he became very disconsolate, and the way was exceedingly narrow and full of abominations, he heard another pilgrim singing, "I will fear no evil," and with that he was made glad, for he hoped to have company by-and-by.

Pilgrims must sing for their own sakes. Songs are the appointed helpmeets of the journey, and if we reject them the road doubles its length. "If the way be weary, tell it Him in song," and in the very telling some of the weariness will have fled. In one of the most powerful of his poems Wordsworth describes a marvellous sunset which he saw from the cliffs on the northwestern coast of England. And this is how he says he felt: "Wings at my shoulders seemed to play." And those are the very wings which play upon the shoulders of pilgrims who pace the highway of the Lord singing the songs of Zion. The song fills the soul with a sense of lightness, and gives nimbleness to the heavy feet. Even Mr. Ready-to-Halt "footed it well" when Mercy began to play upon the lute, and melody was heard upon the road.

And we must force ourselves to sing the song even when the bird has injured wings. "How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?" Yes, but as Dr. Rendel Harris has somewhere said, "What might have happened if they had tried?" What missionary influence there might have been

in the uplifted psalm! A song in the night has a haunting strain! "Nearer, my God, to Thee," sung when the tempest is sweeping down the road, becomes a call and an evangel to many who have not yet turned to the pilgrim road. And so the pilgrim heart should be the home of song. Song shortens the road, it doubles the service.

XXXI

THE EAGLE LIFE

"They shall mount up with wings."
Isa. xl. 31.

"My religious organs have been ailing for a while past. I have lain a sheer hulk in consequence. But I got out my wings, and have taken a change of air!" That is just it, we forget or neglect our wings. We travel along our roads as mere pedestrians, and we are sorely overcome, for the hostility of our circumstances wearies us to the dust. Or we are engaged upon some exacting ministry which imprisons us in our particular place. Or maybe we are shut up in a chamber of sickness, either as the patient or in service upon the patient. In a hundred different ways we can be cribbed, cabined, and confined, and our religious organs are in danger of becoming sickly, and of losing their brightness both in mood and discernment.

And all the time those wings are waiting!

And if we would we could soar into larger regions in an ampler air. In one of his most powerful poems Browning addresses an angel as "thou bird of God!" And surely we are entitled to use the phrase of the soul. Perhaps we have held too much to the conception of the pilgrims, and even in our thinking we may have kept too close to the road. We are not only pilgrims of the night; quite as truly we are the birds of God, endowed with power to mount up with wings as eagles, to respond to the upward calling, and to breathe the lofty air of the heavenliness in Christ Jesus. But we forget our wings!

We are like the Alpine insects of which Fabre tells us in his wonderful book on the grasshopper. "I do not know," he says, "why the insect deprives itself of wings and remains a plodding wayfarer, when its near kinsman, on the same Alpine swards, is excellently equipped for flight. It possesses the germs of wings and wing-case, but it does not think of developing them. It persists in hopping, with no further ambition; it is satisfied to go on foot." These words of the great naturalist are as true of multitudes of men and women as they are of the insects

that hop about the lower slopes of the Alps. They walk; they never soar. They go along the road with heavy feet; they never rise in joyful exaltation. They are always on the earth. They never leave the earth and return to it again with freshened spirits after a renewing flight in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. They have no upper air which they regard as part of their blessed inheritance.

Even the finest pilgrims are those who remember that they are also birds. The crusaders, who wage the noblest conflicts along the road, are just those who get out their wings and soar for a change of air. The man who takes occasional flights to the new Jerusalem is a more efficient labourer in the old Jerusalem. The man whose citizenship is in heaven is sure to be a very noble citizen of earth. They have the freshest eye, and the most hopeful vision, and the most inspiring mood, and all this just because they are the most inspired. They are "true to the kindred points of heaven and home."

And how do we put on the wings? "They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall mount

up with wings!" In this realm communion is ascension. When we turn our hearts unto the Lord the power of wing is ours, and we can rise from our little prisons, or from our tiresome road, into the high heaven of spiritual rest and vision. In the Christian life rising is resting. When we have been on the wing we shall be able to walk and not faint. And those wings are waiting for us! But how we do forget them!

XXXII

LIKE THE WAVES

"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! . . . then had thy righteousness been like the waves of the sea."

Isa. xlviii. 18.

So that is what our rectitude is to be like; it is to possess an irresistible energy which will make it like the waves of the sea. I am writing these words in mid-Atlantic, and I have just been watching one gigantic wave which has hurled itself against our boat with terrific force and made it tremble from bow to stern. But we need not be a thousand miles away on the Atlantic to experience the power of the waves. We have watched the common breakers as they emptied their floods upon the shore, smashing up every impediment, and carrying every opposing thing before them as they raced along the beach. They toss heavy beams about like shuttlecocks, and they take up boulders and throw them hither and thither as a very little

thing. And our righteousness is to be like that, tremendous and inevitable.

But our righteousness is too often like a tiny runlet which has scarcely outlasted the drought. There are streamlets which just creep along in indolence as though at any moment they might lose themselves in the sands. A little child can turn them aside. Make a little channel with your foot and the water takes the new course. You can lead them where you please; they have no power, no imperative trend, no uncompromising destiny. And the righteousness in some lives is just like these faint and easily diverted streams. It is a mere rill of loyalty, and anything and anybody can change its goings. An opposing difficulty arises, and the feeble conviction seeks an easier way. If Vanity Fair interposes, or the mysterious enticements of the Enchanted Ground, this anæmic righteousness is entirely lost. It has no force, no inherent and unbribable energy; there is nothing imperative about it, nothing glorious and irresistible.

It is God's will that our righteousness should be like the waves of the sea. Think of our moral energy advancing against

temptations with the power of an advancing tide! Think of our encountering moral obstacles and "impossibles" with the mighty strength of racing waves! And think of the co-operative strength of the righteousness of the Church of Christ attacking social evils with all the tremendous assault of a great sea! Too often we only tickle evils, we do not smash them! We flow lazily around them, we do not sweep them away!

"O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments," then this mighty wave of power would have been ours. But this "hearkening" implies divine communion. It is the listening of reverence, it is the mood of reception. This sort of hearkening makes the soul hospitable to the divine, and the great God enters in. And it is the God within us Who makes our righteousness like the waves of the sea. "I can do all things in Christ Who strengtheneth me." With God within we are irresistible.

XXXIII

THE DIVINE MINISTRY OF DISPLACEMENT

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."
Isa. lv. 13.

These words unveil one of the great ways of our God. He displaces one thing by another. The fir comes up in strength and fills the place that was occupied by the thorn. The myrtle appears in vigour and makes its home in the bed of the brier. And so it is in the soul of man. God crowds out one thing by another and the first thing withers away. He imparts His own spirit, and the new spirit excludes the old temper. He gives a vision and some prejudice dies. He plants a royal virtue and some miserable vice disappears. This is how the Lord makes His gardens. It is the wonderful process described in Dr. Chalmers' famous and familiar phrase, "The expulsive power of a new affection."

And so it becomes clear what a harrowingly disappointing way it is to try to create

a garden in the spirit by merely pulling up the weeds. I read this counsel in a book of devotion: "Pull up one fault a week, and what a clearance there will be in the course of the year!" It is disastrous advice, and there will be no end of heartache at the close of the year. In the first place, who knows what his faults and vices really are? There are some which the Bible describes as "presumptuous." Anybody can see them because they are so glaring. But there are others which the Bible describes as "secret," and their hiding-place is as intricate as a rabbit warren. "Who can discern his errors?" Who can tell just what they are?

And, as a second difficulty in the way of this counsel, who is to determine the order in which the vices are to be removed? Which is the more deadly, drunkenness or falsehood, and which shall go out first? Which is the more insidious influence, pride or envy? Which does the more harm, jealousy or censoriousness? What shall we first lay hold of in the work of uprooting? Shall we seize a presumptuous sin or seek for something more secret? A furtive cancer is more serious than an external rash.

And there is still another question. How may we know that a vice is really uprooted, and that the last delicate fibre of its most secret rootlet has been removed? How may we be quite sure that there is nothing left to form the beginning of a new growth? Who is to say when the soil is clean and when every bit of thorn and brier has been cast out? It is surely very bad counsel to urge us to clean our hearts by weeding.

There is nothing for it but to hand over the thorny, briery desert to the Lord. "Here is the wilderness of my life! I surrender it to Thee, most holy and gracious Lord!" And the good Lord accepts the surrendered desert. The first thing He does is to renew the soil by the mighty enriching energies of His grace. And then He plants His new growths. He plants the vigorous word of His truth, and the thorns and briers of falsity are smothered in its presence. He imparts His own peace, and there is an end of the thorns of feverish distraction, and there is an end of the briers of ill-temper and discord. And He gives His own joy, and the thorns of discontent cannot live beside it, and the briers of moroseness and bitterness

pass away. That is the great secret of the transformed wilderness. It is our part to abide in the great Gardener, and He will make His own garden.

XXXIV

THE GAZE OF THE QUESTIONER

"They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces thitherwards." JER. l. 5.

THE trouble is that so many people inquire about a thing while their faces are set upon something else. They ask about one way but they are looking another. They are interested in theology but not in religion. They will engage in ecclesiastical controversy, but they will not surrender themselves as vital members of the Church of Christ. They will discuss the psychology of conversion, but they will not turn their feet toward home and seek the Lord with all their minds and hearts. They will study the map, but they have no intention of making the journey. They will read the guide-book, but they are not like travellers whose faces are steadfastly set to go to Jerusalem. They inquire concerning Zion, but their faces do witness against them.

Now that kind of inquiring is fruitless. What is the good of asking questions in one direction while the soul is looking another? For one thing, such a soul does not bring the needful equipment for the apprehension of the truth. A merely curious spirit can never really know the secrets of the Lord. It is one of the conditions of spiritual discovery that the entire strength of mind and heart be brought to the exploration, and that we ask, and seek, and batter away at the closed doors until they open, and we pass from room to room in the ever-brightening rooms of the temple of truth, which is the home of our God. The secret of the Lord is not revealed to a mere debating society; it is unveiled in the holy place where we have built an altar and offered our entire being in holy sacrifice. The man who is only curious is turned empty away. The seriousness, or flippancy, of our questions will be seen in the fixed direction of our gaze. Are our faces thitherward?

Every minister is acquainted with the talking inquirers whose souls are looking another way. They will discuss the Atonement by the hour, but if we ask, "Do you desire

to have your sins forgiven, and to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?" we speedily find that their faces are not thitherward. They will question through a long night, even to the cock-crow, about the divinity of our Lord, but if we ask them if they are ready to cast their crowns at His feet, we see at a glance that their faces are not thitherward. And therefore all such questioning is a waste of time. Nay, it is worse than a waste of time, for it wastes the powers of the soul in a semblance of earnestness which is only an unreal and painted fire. If there is ever to be revelation and revolution, the asking must be packed by that eager and determined gazing which is the primary secret of triumphant prayer.

XXXV

THE ALMOND TREE

"Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what seest thou?' And I said, 'I see the rod of an almond tree.' Then the Lord said unto me, 'Thou hast well seen, for I watch over my word to perform it.'"

JER. i. 11–12.

THE almond tree is the first tree to lift its blooms in mastery of winter. It is in flower when all other things are sleeping. It is like a wakeful, watchful sentinel when all the troops are locked in slumber. Or shall we rather say that the almond tree is always first upon the field? No other tree ever anticipates it or takes it by surprise. And so it is with our God. He is the wakeful Presence when all other beings are asleep. The merely clever man, the cunning man, discovers that the place is occupied which he designed to fill alone. God is before him! The enemies of the Lord are always too late. God watches over Israel: He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Well, here is a young man named Jeremiah, who has been called to an unfamiliar and exacting office. He is fearful before the prospect; he trembles at the demand. He feels his lack of experience. He is miserably conscious of the poverty of his equipment. He shrinks from the task. It will be too much for him. His enemies are many, and they have the double advantage of years and ingenuity. In every emergency he will be outrun. In every crisis he will be outclassed and outdone. "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak; for I am a child!"

And as he walks along the way, buried in this melancholy mood, the Spirit of God directs his eyes and mind to an almond tree as it unrolls its living banners over the wintry waste. "Jeremiah, what seest thou?" And as he gazes upon it the almond tree becomes sacramental, a vital symbol of still more significant things. It is awake, while everything else is sleeping. "And I," says the Lord, "watch over My word to perform it." The young prophet is not abandoned to the thin armour of scanty experience. He is not left to the mercy of more "knowing" antagonists. His God anticipates all human

devices. His servants do not follow a blind leadership. Neither do we walk in our sleep. Following God, we are children of the day, and we walk in the light even as He is in the light.

And thus it is that the servant of the Lord finds prepared ground at every step of the road. "The Lord, He it is that goeth before thee!" God has a plan of campaign: there are no surprises in His warfare; every hostile attack is foreseen and provided for. We are not led by ignorance or by caprice which is confused a hundred times a day. Our God has eyes! He is Alpha and Omega, and He sees the end from the beginning. He is the first and the last on the field.

And, therefore, with such a leader, trembling fear should change into songful courage. It is not enemy's country through which we are marching, and where he alone is familiar with the ground. "We are marching through Emmanuel's land!" And we are to step out with a steadfast assurance which is the parent of peace and quiet joy. We are to begin our difficult tasks in the blessed mood of finished achievement. We are to sing doxologies as we go forth to

battle. We are to give thanks for the blessings "we are about to receive," and the thanksgiving must be a vital part of our fighting before even the real struggle begins. I mean that battles must be won in our hearts before they are fought in the open field. Jeremiah must slay his fears before he can subdue priests and kings. He must believe in their overthrow before they can be overthrown. He must expect it before it will happen. He must see victory on the way, and he must sing the songs of victory because he sees his God. That was the way of Jesus, and it must be our way. Our Lord Jesus gave thanks for miracles before they happened. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me!" When that word was spoken Lazarus was still in the tomb, but with the grace and thanksgiving upon His lips He commanded grim death to loose its bonds, and Lazarus came forth! Jesus believed in the wakefulness of God, and He confidently assumed it at every turning of the way.

XXXVI

FIXEDNESS OF CHARACTER

"I have made thee . . . an iron pillar."
JER. i. 18.

THAT great, divine word was spoken to a young prophet who was timidly shrinking from his stern commission. The odds seemed all against him. Principalities and powers were ranked in fierce antagonism. The priesthood was his foe. He had not even the support of the people. "Ah, Lord God, I am a child!" He felt like a broken twig in the fierce current of a river in flood. He felt like a desert-reed in a tempest. And it was just in that season, when his heart trembled before a tremendous task, that the Lord spake to him and said, "Be not dismayed; I have made thee an iron pillar!" The young prophet was divinely equipped for his divine commission. He was to be matched with the hour. His mind was to be established in the truth of God. His heart was to be con-

firmed in the purpose of God. His will was to be possessed by the holy strength of God. He was to confront all hostilities like an iron pillar—not breaking, not bending, not yielding—invincible, to the onslaught of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In all great crises these divinely-fashioned pillars are the salvation of the State. The crises are not always times of war. They may be times of luxury, and apathy, and ease. The grave dangers, maybe, abound in Lotus-land, in heavy and slumbrous afternoons. There are subtle perils on the Enchanted Ground as well as in Vanity Fair. Indeed, a warrior may fight his way through Vanity Fair and collapse on the Enchanted Ground. And so we need stalwart Greathearts who are invincible in every place and season. We need men and women of absolutely settled and vital convictions, who are "rooted and grounded," as the Apostle Paul says in his agricultural-architectural figure —men and women who are able to stand against the enervating airs from the south and the fierce blasts from the icy north. It is the souls of this order, steady and deter-

mined at all times, who are the pillars of a people's hopes.

In his hero lecture on Cromwell, Thomas Carlyle has these words: "Perhaps of all the persons in that anti-Puritan struggle, from first to last, the single indispensable one was Cromwell. To see, and dare, and decide, to be a fixed pillar in a welter of uncertainty: a king among men, whether they called him so or not." And that is the purposed office and distinction of every soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ, and pre-eminently so in the times through which we are passing. We are to be as fixed pillars among folk who are shaking in uncertainty. We are to steady those who are trembling. We are to be strong enough for timid hearts to lean upon. And this glorious strength we are to receive from our Lord as the gift of His grace. He is the fashioner of this royal character, and in His hands the reed, which is shaken by the wind, is transformed into an iron pillar which cannot be moved.

XXXVII

THE MAKING OF HEROES

"The people that do know their God shall be strong, and shall do exploits."

DAN. xi. 32.

IT is like a strong and noble tree, of which the roots are found in a certain knowledge, and the fruit in heroic deeds. Exploits are not manufactured goods. They are not the deliberate creation of set purpose. They are not works; they are fruits. They are not made; they are grown. They are not the startling surprises of occasional ventures; they are the natural and spontaneous expression of the habits of the soul. A true hero is always heroic. Sometimes his heroism is seen by the public, but he is still heroic when the audience has withdrawn. This kind of tree "yields her fruit every month" —that is to say, there is no season when its fruit cannot be found.

If, therefore, a life is to abound in heroic deeds it must have the heroic nature. It

must "be strong" if it is to "do exploits." Every other kind of heroism is superficial, and it will pass with the occasion which excited it. We want a heroism which is heroic in its own secret thoughts. We want heroes who slay dragons in private. We want the royal courage which strangles an unworthy impulse as soon as it is born. We want exploits in sacrificial thinking, magnificent conquests of selfishness in the quiet courts of the soul. A real man must wrestle with lions and bears in the jungle of his own spirit, and there he must register a courage of which the world has no account. All of which means that a man must be a hero in the very pith and fibre of his being. It must be his nature to be heroic.

And how can we deal with a man's nature excepting through his God? How can we make the tree good? The prophet's word gives us the eternal answer—if a man is to "be strong" he must "know God." And that is not the shallow knowledge of recognition, it is the vital knowledge of communion; it is the partaking of the divine nature. It is the living fellowship which makes a man a branch on the living vine. The life-sap of

the tree of life pervades every fibre of his being. He lives; yet not he; Christ liveth in him. In such a life all the fruit shall be exploits, and the flavour of the heroic shall be in everything.

XXXVIII

IRREVERENT FEAR

"I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."

JONAH i. 9.

THAT is a seemingly sane expression of a very healthy piety. Here is a man contemplating the stormy heavens and the assembled wonders of the tempestuous seas. And his heart bows in reverence and in Godly fear. But is all this really happening? Who is the man? It is Jonah, and at the very moment he is speaking he is in flight from his appointed task. He has been commissioned to go to Nineveh, and he is deliberately turning his course to Tarshish. And he makes a profession of his religious devotion in the very season when he is abandoning his commission. Here, then, is a strange encounter. Here is piety and duty in conflict. Here is a song of loyalty wedded to an act of desertion. This man makes the ways of trespass

resound with the notes of praise. This man fears the Lord and shirks his task.

How does such a strange association come about! What is the origin of this incongruous wedding? Can there be such a mongrel as impious piety? Yes, I think there can. Can there be such a perversion as immoral religion? Yes, I think there can. Was Jonah genuine when he declared his fear of the Lord? Yes, I believe he was. How, then, does it come about that a man can be singing a psalm while he is on his way to Tarshish? I think this is the explanation. Jonah's religion was in the realm of feeling, it was not in the realm of action. It centred in the emotions and not in the will. It was a matter of sentiment and not of obedience. It was a question of "feeling nice" rather than of "doing justly," and of "walking humbly with thy God." And that is the strange divorce which anyone can successfully accomplish in his own life. We can cultivate our emotions independently of our wills. Of course the emotions are counterfeit and delusive, but there they are, and it is the easiest thing in the world for us to assume that they are genuine, and so at length to believe in

their reality. There is nothing which is so cunningly deceptive as artificial emotion. We can generate any amount of it, and when we are under its sway we can believe we are having a really good time. The emotional world may be our religious world, and as long as our emotions are lively we can believe ourselves alive.

And thus it comes about that we have indictments like this in the word of God. "Ye have given your tears to the altar, and ye have married the daughter of a strange god." Yes, and their degradation was seen in this, that they were sincere in both. They gave their emotions to the Lord, and they gave their wills to a strange god. When the notorious Pigott, who forged the name of Parnell, the Irish leader, was examined after his suicide, it was found that he was wearing a crucifix next to his skin. He was a living lie and he was hugging a crucifix. The crucifix carried his emotions, the lie expressed his will.

And thus it was with Jonah; he feared the Lord and he fled to Tarshish. But what is this fear worth which shirks its appointed task? It is devoid of all saving salt, and it

adds itself to the forces of corruption. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." How great is the contrast. One sort of fear is the ally of death, the other makes everything alive. One kills the sense of duty, the other quickens obligation and turns statues into songs.

XXXIX

LITTLE-MINDEDNESS

"God repented . . . But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry."

JONAH iv. 1.

THAT is a most extraordinary conjunction of circumstances. A great city had repented of its sin, and because of its repentance God had lifted the curse. The dark, menacing cloud had been rolled up like a garment, and the blue sky was unveiled, a radiant symbol of forgiveness, and hope, and peace. But here is a prophet who had predicted that the black cloud would break in terrors of tempest and overwhelming flood, and because events had turned out otherwise, and black sky had been changed into blue, he was displeased exceedingly and he was angry. That is very startling, a man blazing in fury because God's hand had moved in pity and in grace! I should have expected that he would have lifted his heart in gladness, and

that he would have sung as the lark sings when the tempest passes away. But, no, he was angry because God was merciful, and his anger is all the more bewildering because God had been merciful to him, and had offered him the open door of a second chance.

How is it that some people are so much sterner than God? How is it that they are so antagonistic to even a trembling suggestion that God's love may go out far beyond our dreams? In my early ministerial life, when I used to dare to speak about anything and everything, I once ventured to preach on the text, "And he went to his own place." The reference is, of course, to Judas Iscariot. I cannot recall what I made of the solemn words, and I am not anxious to recall it. I certainly should hesitate to speak about it now. But I do remember one thing. I remember that, in closing the sermon, I left "our brother Judas" in the hands of God's wonderful mercy, and I quoted the familiar words of Tom Hood:

"Owning his weakness,
His evil behaviour,
And leaving with meekness
His sins to his Saviour."

When I got back to my vestry a lady followed me storming with passion. She knew all about the fate of Judas. She could not have spoken with greater assurance if she had stood by the great White Throne and heard the words of final judgment. And what right had I, she said, to, etc., etc., etc., etc. She was "displeased exceedingly." I had rested my bewildered mind in the marvellous hostel of the divine mercy, and she was very angry.

> "The love of God is broader
> Than the measure of man's mind,
> And the heart of the Eternal
> Is most wonderfully kind."

But there are some people who seem to prefer the prison of God's law to the comforting home of God's grace. Or shall I put it like this—they would fain imprison the grace of God in the fetters of His own law. They would silence the Father in the Judge. They seem to like to live near Sinai, with its thunderings and lightnings, its cloud and its tempest, rather than on the Hill of Beatitudes, with a sight of another hill called Calvary, a green hill just outside the city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified

Who died to save us all. They have chosen a very shaking and disturbing site for their spiritual home. I prefer a sunnier spot, where grace is abounding, and where there are resources of spiritual hope and comfort which are called "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Yes, I prefer to pitch my tent at a sheltered spot called Expectation Corner, from whence I can look out upon the multitudinous mercies of the Lord, and there is more than enough in that outlook to fill my days with fruitful vision and my nights with happy dreams. And if I see the redeeming pity of God resting upon anybody on whom there once seemed to rest dark menace and frown, I will certainly not be angry or displeased. Rather shall my mouth be filled with happy laughter, and I will rejoice with the Great Shepherd because he has found another of His sheep which was lost.

XL

WEEK-DAY HOLINESS

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord."

ZECH. xiv. 20.

NOT only shall church-bells pour forth their holy intimations, and their divine significance, but the bells upon the horses shall bear the same testimony in the centres of business and trade. These are holy bells ringing in the midst of common circumstances. This is a very large and health-giving sense of consecration; it not only pervades the holy place in the temple, but it includes the outer courts, and it sends forth its purifying energies into the bustling affairs of the street. We are prone to limit the holiness we seek to the floor and circumstances of the sanctuary; but here is a holiness which moves with the swift things of the thoroughfares and distinguishes the couriers of commerce. It is holiness amid the fast life of the ordinary world.

Now holiness is always a very unimpressive weakling if it cannot face and endure the rigours and inclemencies of the street. It has the inevitable paleness of all cloistered virtue. It never gets beyond the wanness of a prison plant. It is an invalid which never goes forth on daring ventures. And it was in reference to this peril of spiritual invalidism that our Lord prayed we might have deliverance: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world." That would mean an escape from hardness, and therefore the deprivation of hardihood. But our Lord purposes for His children spiritual lustiness. "Endure hardness as a good soldier!" God's trees are able to stand in exposed places. They thrive in the blast. They reveal incomparable vigour in the streets of the city, where there are cross-currents, and where rough winds are blowing. All of which means that the holy glory of the divine communion will break into our most commonplace circumstances, and colour and transfigure them. It expresses itself in the great cardinal virtue of justice, integrity, fair-play, magnanimity and wise compassion. It emerges in the pure and noble dig-

nity of faithful words. It is revealed in all the varied forms of a strong and winsome fraternity. The divine holiness is unveiled in all that is truly human. The bells upon the horses mingle harmoniously with the melody of the church bells.

Now these bells upon the horses are very attractive heralds of the King. Many men and women, who are never arrested by the church bells, listen to the bells that ring through the busy streets of trade. They would not be impressed if they saw us looking very holy in church, but they are impressed when they find us scrupulously holy in our business. That kind of music makes very indifferent people stand, and listen, and talk. When I do a bit of business with a man, and I hear the bell-music of divine honour, sounding through the transaction, the strong music makes me think, and may very soon make me pray. And this great kind of consecrated life is possible because the Lord Jesus Christ is so greatly consecrated to us—we are not limited in the Lord, and all things are possible in the inexhaustible powers of His grace.

XLI

ON THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

HAB. iii. 17–18.

THERE is something very arresting in a man's words when he stands in a hard and difficult place. We hold our breath to catch the testimony of men who are marching through the darkness of the night. I can just remember my old minister, Dr. Enoch Mellor, in the day when he suffered the bereavement of his wife. I was a very young lad, but I vividly remember with what impatient eagerness I waited to learn what his text would be when he appeared again in the pulpit. And my spirit was awed when he read out the words, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, for Thou didst it." There was a quiet serene courage as of a man whose

confidence was sure, for he saw the hosts of the Lord upon the road.

But a man's word and act are always arresting when he is brought to the edge of a cliff. When the material means of life begin to fail! When the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine. Or when we lose some faculty or power which has been a vital instrument in our work and existence. How do we adjust ourselves to the change, and what kind of witness is there in our adjustment? Henry Fawcett lost the sight of both eyes when he was out shooting on the moors. He was a highly-gifted man, and he had brilliant political prospects, and it seemed as if they were all blotted out with the loss of his sight. But as soon as he was led back home he said to his staggering father, who had just heard the news, "Father, it shall make no difference." When General Booth suffered a similar loss, and found himself blind in old age, he said to his son, "Bramwell, I have sought to serve the Lord with my sight, now I must serve Him with my blindness." These men, and countless others, have built altars out of ap-

parent ruins, and they dedicated themselves anew in the hour of their disaster.

It is a wonderful thing to sound God's praises on an apparently broken instrument, and to compel the instrument to yield the sweetest music. God does not despise the broken reed, and we must not despise it, even though the breakage be in our own life. In the divine fellowship we can make our very breakages bear witness to His grace, and we can fetch melody out of our disasters. Men's words are always very vital when they breathe a quiet courage amid the smashing blows of calamity. "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." That man "builds a heaven in hell's despair."

God does not leave hard places without His own witness. God has wonderful manna for the desert. There is a mysterious bottle of water near Hagar as she wanders in the wilderness. There are "sustaining herbs" on the "cliff-edge of misery." The tree of life lifts itself in utterly unsuspected places, and it bears its fruit in every kind of season. Yes, God has food for courage. We are not left in loneliness and negligence when we come to the brink of terrible things. "I

will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The Lord of Gethsemane and Calvary will not desert us when we come to the brinks and precipices where death and destruction seem to make their home. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." "Behold angels came and ministered unto Him."

XLII

BAFFLED TO FIGHT BETTER

"When I fall I shall arise."
MIC. ii. 8.

ONE of the primary secrets of a victorious life is to learn how to take defeat. We are not to be too much surprised by it. Still less are we to be startled and unnerved by it. We are to be prepared for it, and we are to allow for it in our plan, and we are to regard it as an incident on the way to final triumph. Now no man is ever really defeated who refuses to accept defeat. A man refuses defeat when in the very hour of apparent adversity he keeps his eyes glued on coming victory. The darkness never conquers so long as the soul is dreaming of the dawn. A man who can sing in the midnight begins to change his midnight into noon. "And at midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them."

There is a great word in Ibsen's play, *The Emperor Julian.* It is spoken by the

Christian, Apollinaris. "Verily I say unto you, so long as song rings out above our sorrows, Satan shall never conquer." It is the very truth of holy writ. But if we are thus to make our sorrows subordinate to our songs, if we are to rise above them, if our very defeats are to become the starting points of victorious campaigns, our faith in the risen Lord must be so strong that our Gethsemane is flooded with the glory of Olivet, and even on our Calvary we can rise into "heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

In Christ Jesus we can extract virtue from our defeats. Out of the eater can come forth meat. We can feed our wills upon our disappointments. Angels' food can be found on fields of apparent disaster. In this great way we can command stones to become bread, and we can emerge, like giants refreshed, from the wilderness and the solitary place.

Our Lord is greatly honoured when we refuse defeat. No higher eulogy can the enemy pay to Christian souls than to say that "they know not when they are beaten." A song in the night is one of the most arresting witnesses to the uplifting power of redeeming grace.

XLIII

OR RATHER!

"But now after that ye have known God, **or rather** are known of God."

GEN. iv. 9.

THE latter way of stating the believer's wealth was to Paul far the more wonderful. It was a "rather" that opened out vistas that were unutterable. Whenever, in any of his letters, he comes in sight of the glory his soul breaks forth in rapturous doxology. In a certain way Nathanael knew Jesus, but when he discovered that He was known of Jesus the fountains of a holier wonder began to flow. And so it was with Zaccheus; he had a faint elementary knowledge of the Christ, but when it unexpectedly dawned upon him that he was known of Christ springs of joy welled forth which he had never experienced before. But in the loftier and still more sacred sense, a sense into which Nathanael and Zaccheus entered at a later day, the Apostle

Paul gloried in consciousness that he was known of the redeeming God, who had gone forth among the children of men in the saving ministry of love and grace.

For God's knowledge of Paul was not the mere knowledge of perception, or of discrimination, or of dry intelligence, but the knowledge of which love is the organ, the yearning, imparting, hallowing communion of the Father's heart. Perhaps we may get a glimpse of different kinds of knowledge by comparing the mere botanist's knowledge of flowers, and the gardener's knowledge, and the poet's and the lover's. I read a book on the "Scenery of Switzerland"; it was by a geologist. And then I read Wordsworth's sonnets on the same scenery. Each revealed his own type of knowledge, but one entered into secrets of which the other did not dream. If all these ministries of knowledge could be combined in one searching, kindling, quickening light, a light that not only reveals but makes alive, a light that conveys the mystery of life, like a mother's yearning knowledge over her child—such knowledge might give us some elementary insight into God's knowledge of the Apostle

Paul and of all who hide with him in the shadow of the Almighty.

When, therefore, Paul speaks of God's knowledge of him he does not think of it as dazzling, heavenly rays falling upon him as the beams of a searchlight fall upon a cottage on some bleak and desolate shore. It is the knowledge of a communion—perhaps a road more than a light—a road filled with divine commerce, even the marvellous riches of redeeming love. In that knowledge are combined the secrets of heavenly wisdom, the gifts of divine love, and the ministries of eternal grace. In that knowledge Paul found his rest, and his hope one day awakening in the likeness of his Lord.

XLIV

SLOW WALKING

"To walk and not faint."

Isa. xl. 31.

That is the severe testing season, when our going slackens down to a slow walk. There is an exhilaration in movement when life speeds along, and its general interests are vivid, and we have congenial and kindling companionship. When the sleigh-horses are galloping, and we are just flying through the air, how the sleigh-bells ring out their merry peal! Bees hum when they are on the wing! And so it is in human life. It is easy to sing when we can mount up with wings as eagles. We come to the supreme test when the swift movement is over, when the merry pace is ended, when the stimulating fellowship is withdrawn, and we come to the slow walk, and something very vital seems to have been lost. It is a happy attainment to mount up

with wings as eagles; it is a noble victory to walk and not to faint.

Sometimes, even when we pass out of the brilliant hours, our busy pace is the soul's defence. Here is a woman nursing her loved one. She is going from morning to night. And then there comes a day when her loving service is no longer required. The sick one has slipped away from her and has recovered immortal health in the healing presence of the Lord. The swift, absorbing pace of the loving nurse is changed into an awfully slow walk when there seems nothing to do. We say one to another, "There will be a reaction!" or we whisper, "There will be a collapse!" It is evidently a great testing time when the saving pace is almost halted, and the ministering servant comes to the hour of folded hands. Can she walk and not faint?

Here is a man who has been wakened to the knowledge of his Saviour. He wakens amid the excitement of a great revival. There is the exhilaration of a multitude. There is the stimulus of music whose volume is as the sound of many waters. He goes night after night, and the unusual and glorious pace of everything keeps his spirit on

the run. Then the day comes when the phenomenal season is over. The extraordinary stimulants are withdrawn. "The tumult and the shouting dies; the captain and the kings depart." The surroundings become quite normal, and he settles down to the slow walk on the ordinary road. That is the testing time. Can we walk and not faint?

That man is not strong who needs the fierce pace, nor is he strong who only reveals his strength in fits of convulsion. He is the strong man who can walk slowly, and under a heavy weight, without staggering. And this triumph is the promised victory of grace, and the grace is surely given to those who "wait upon the Lord." Grace offers strength for the trudge on the long, grey road. Nay, grace offers more than strength, it offers Companionship. It is not satisfied with the gift of power; its gift is a Friend, and He brings His own cordials and balms to our sorrows, and His own bread to our hungry needs. "They that wait upon the Lord shall walk and not faint."

XLV

THE EAGLE LIFE

"They shall mount up with wings as eagles."
ISA. xl. 31.

I HAVE been reading a recently published Life of Roosevelt and I think that the outstanding sentence in the book is one spoken by Mrs. Roosevelt when the last of her four boys had enlisted in the service of his country. Mr. Roosevelt was just a little daunted when the last, and youngest, left for the Front; but Mrs. Roosevelt said to him, "You must not bring up your children like eagles, and expect them to act like sparrows." It is a royal word: it links itself with some of the great sayings of the Roman mothers, which are still ringing through the years. Her boys had been created for great ventures, and when the call came they went forth as naturally as eagles when they leave their eerie for hazardous flights.

And Mrs. Roosevelt's word unveils the

true ideal of discipline and training. We are to rear our boys and girls in such largeness and quality of being that they will instinctively do the big thing because they are made and moulded in big ways. They are not to turn to the path of venture with trembling and reluctant choice, but because it is their nature to do it. They are eagle in spirit and they are to take to the vast ways as naturally as they breathe.

And this, too, is the teaching of our Lord. In all His teaching the primary emphasis is on the state of being, and only secondarily upon the issues in conduct. Create an eagle, and you may look for eagle flights. Make the tree good and good fruit will appear in sure sequence. The teaching is expressed in many different ways. "Ye are of your father the devil." Christ lays his finger upon the very substance of their souls, the fibres of their nature, "the works of your father are absolutely sure" What is in will come out. We cannot weave fine robes from rotten fibre. We cannot have pure streams from foul springs. We cannot have exploits from cowards. The sparrow will not take the path of the eagle.

There are three verbs of very different degrees of value. There is the verb "to have." What a swaggering place it fills in the speech of men! It denominates a man's material possessions. And there is the verb "to do," a word of much more vital significance. It dominates a man's activity and services. Thirdly, there is the verb "to be," which is incomparably more vital than the other two. It denominates the essential nature and character of a man, and its contents reveal his inherent work. Not in what we have, and in what we do, but in what we are is found the real clue to the value of our life. Are we sparrows or eagles? Who is the father of our spirits? Are we partakers of the divine nature? What am I, who am I? a child of dust or a son of God? It is the glory of redeeming grace to change the character and quality of our beings. We can be re-created in Christ Jesus. We can be endued with the powers of endless life. We can have the eagle spirit, and then we shall "mount up with wings as eagles, we shall run and not be weary: we shall walk and not faint."

XLVI

THE STRENGTH OF THE INSIGNIFICANT

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob . . . I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument with teeth."
Isa. iv. 15.

It would be scarcely possible to find two images in more violent contrast than these. On the one hand is a worm, which a harrow can tear in pieces. And on the other hand is an instrument with teeth, a thing which can break other things in pieces. That is the contrast—a worm, soft, helpless and trodden on; and an instrument with teeth, firm, positive, impressive, ascendant! And the Lord God is to change the one into the other. The commanding word is spoken of a people, but the promise is equally and gloriously true as addressed to the individual. Our God can endow the weakling with strength and character, by which he shall be able to write his services in deep, clear letters upon the life of his generation. He can

transform the worm, and possess it with a force by which it shall leave its mark upon the fellowship of the race.

The miracle has been witnessed ten thousand times. The life that appeared very weak and helpless has been marvellously converted into impressive strength. I suppose that if we could trace the influence of the slave Onesimus we should see that it had made deep marks on the life of his master Philemon. Many a noble lineament in the character of Philemon was probably due to the strong but unconscious pressure of his now transformed and consecrated slave. The splendid spiritual loyalty of the servant etched many a fine line in the countenance of the saint. And if we knew everything I wonder what we should see of the influence of the transformed John Mark upon the Apostle Paul. Mark had been a weakling, so weak indeed that Paul wished to discard him as unfitted for the high honours and tremendous tasks of the missionary of the Cross. But the Lord laid an invigorating hold on the worm, John Mark, and I am wondering what distinguishing lines he engraved upon the glorious character of the

Apostle who was once willing to cast him away!

This transforming power is, in Christ Jesus, the promised and privileged possession of everybody. Thomas Carlyle wrote in one of his essays: "The genuine use of gunpowder I believe to be that it makes all men alike tall." Yes, gunpowder makes the little Japanese the height of the British grenadier! And the marvellous power of the Holy Spirit, which transformed mere worms into magnificent instruments of grace, makes wonderful work of small and commonplace folk. "Things that are not" are used to "bring to nought things that are!" Mere nothings are alive with omnipotence. The slenderest wire becomes the channel of the electric current. The humblest slave enters into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." That is the transforming Minister and He is every day engaged on His miraculous work. "I know not the man!" There's the worm! "When they saw the boldness of Peter!" There's the threshing instrument with teeth! Pentecost had been!

XLVII

DUNGEONED HEARTS

"Is it nothing to you, all that ye pass by?"
LAM. i. 12.

GREAT things were happening, but these folks seemed to know nothing about it. God was on the field in mighty movement, but these folks were indifferent. They seemed to be living in another world, and the other world was a self-created prison. There are dungeoned hearts. The dungeon is not built in a day, but every day we may add to the thickness of its walls and strengthen its power of imprisonment. The walls are built from the secretions of selfishness. A selfish soul creates its own bondage. I would say that it exudes a deposit which seals up its own sympathies and discernments. Its relationships are checked and contracted more and more, and its fine communions are destroyed. At last, all the active sensitive power of the life are shut up in a heart of

stone; they have become petrified; they are numb. They have no more feeling than statues, they do not hear the clamant and pitiful cries of the streets.

Herbert Spencer devised a sort of stopping with which he filled his ears when he wished to shut himself away from a company and retire from any part in their conversation. His biography offers abundant evidence that he was equally successful in more costly forms of self-imprisonment. There was a strange contraction of his sympathies, and his relationship with the pathetic needs of man was more fretful and irritable than helpful. In some directions he acquired a perilous benumbment. But then this is a peril which besets us all. We can dungeon our hearts until the great cries of the world cannot reach us. Men can be "made to stumble" and we burn not. Indeed, we do not hear the wails of men. Many a cry may come from many a Macedonia, but they beat against a stony heart when they ought to be received on sensitive heart-strings which thrill with eager and sympathetic response.

In all such experiences the soul is suffering a deadly contraction. In dungeon lives the

soul is like a shrivelling kernel, becoming smaller and smaller in its hard encasement. And yet the supreme purpose of life is to grow a great soul, and to help other souls to grow theirs. Souls with large communings are like spacious harbours, offering hospitable commerce to the laden liners which come from the near and distant parts of mankind. Our souls are purposed to have big relationships with God and man. Aye, with God! But the dungeoned heart ceases to have communion with God. It does not heed. It does not hear. "I stretched out my hands to you all the day long, and ye would not hear." We cannot selfishly build a wall of stone between us and our fellows and maintain a living communion with our God. Dying sympathies and vital devotions cannot dwell together in one heart. If our interest in humanity is shrinking, we cannot have a large and growing intimacy with God. The dungeoned heart shuts out both God and man. "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

XLVIII

THE SOUND SLEEP OF THE COWARD

"He lay and was fast asleep."
JONAH i. 5.

"HE was fast asleep." And yet that man was in flight from a duty which had been laid upon him by the Lord. He was travelling in the way of rebellion. He had shaken himself free from life's sanctities and he had turned his back upon the great white throne. And yet he could sleep, and his sleep was like infants' slumbers, soft and light. And he could do this while a tempest was shrieking across the deep. One might have expected that he would never sleep a wink. Surely his conscience would be thundering in his soul, and his agitated being would give his body no rest. Does not the Divine Nemesis chase a deserter, and does it not prevent him from pitching his tent in quiet places and lying down in innocent sleep? Can bad men sleep while dutiful men are awake at

hazardous posts? Yes, that seems to be the significance of the narrative. Jonah was a rebel, and yet he slept soundly in the unhallowed way of desertion.

Our great dramatists have usually troubled the sleep of their villains. The ill deeds of the villains march with them into their tent and chamber and goad them into fearful dreams. It was so with the Duke of Clarence: "Oh, I have passed a miserable night!" It was so with Richard III: "I did but dream! O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!" It was so with Lady Macbeth: "Here's the smell of the blood still!" And so it was with all Shakespeare's villains. Their sleep is troubled: the sword of judgment gleams through their dreams. They have followed evil ways of their own devising, and they have lost the precious gift of restful sleep.

And yet I think it is a worse penalty when we have sinned and retained the power of sleep, when we can lie down in undisturbed rest as though we had just returned from a healthy walk in paths of righteousness. There is something terrible in the judgment which rests upon a man when he can sin and

not be troubled, when he can leave his appointed post and go to sleep like one who has spent a noble day in splendid vigilance. Jonah was a coward, and he slept soundly while better men were awake.

The most appalling judgment of sin has been inflicted when we become "past feeling." Every sin works like a drug, and continued sin tends to stupefaction. The more we sin, the less we care. It is the subtlety of sin to create delusive conditions, and a very fatal part of the delusion is a deadly sense of contentment. We can lie and be comfortable. We can desert and sit happily at the feast. But it is the comfort of the opium-eater, it is the sleep of the benumbed, it is the restfulness of death. Let us clearly understand the possibility that lies in our hands; we can live wickedly into a debased contentment; we can drug ourselves into apathy. But how wretched is the contentment! How tragically small is our world! Our comfort is drowsiness mistaken for happiness: it is the fœtid air of a tiny room mistaken for the vital air of the mountains. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and knowest

not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind!"

There is no rest to compare with the rest that is found in the Lord. There is no peace like unto the peace of the Lord which passeth all understanding. There is no comfort which is fit to be named beside the consolations of the Spirit. There is no sleep like the sleep which God giveth to His beloved.

THE END

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